

Commentary

October 2004

Perfection *A Story* Mark Helprin

Is Russia Going Backward? *Leon Aron*

Jewish Security & Jewish Interests *Jack Wertheimer*

Our Stake in Taiwan *Arthur Waldron*

Chomsky's Universe *Arch Puddington*

Architecture (Bling!) *Michael J. Lewis*

Jerome Robbins in Person *Terry Teachout*

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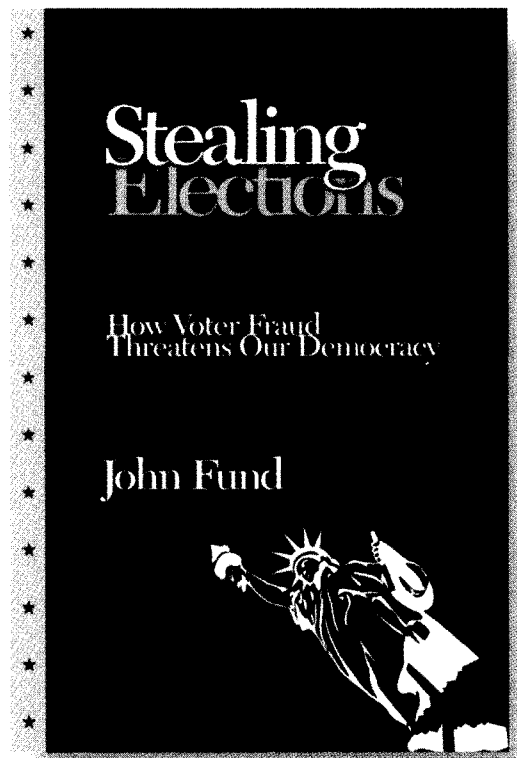
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VOTER FRAUD 2004

THE FLORIDA FIASCO OF 2000, with hanging chads, butterfly ballots and Supreme Court intervention, may have been just a preview of coming attractions. In *Stealing Elections*, John Fund shows that the U.S. has the sloppiest election system of any industrialized nation, so sloppy that at least eight of the 19 hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had registered to vote while making their deadly preparations for 9/11.

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Now, as both parties hire lawyers to contest potentially close elections in several battleground states, we may be looking at Florida 2000 times ten. Writing with urgency and authority, John Fund shows how a lethal combination of bureaucratic bungling and ballot rigging have put our democracy at risk.



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E. Robert Goodkind,
President

Letters from Readers

Sharon's Plan

TO THE EDITOR:

It has long been my belief that Israel can choose to have either peace or the settlements but not both; Hillel Halkin suggests that Ariel Sharon, at long last, has reached the same conclusion ["Does Sharon Have a Plan?," June].

What, then, should Israel do? It is certainly understandable if the unremitting Palestinian violence of the past four years has led Israelis to conclude that *no* peaceful resolution is available because many Palestinians and their intractable supporters in the Arab world will not accept Israel on any terms, and that the violence would continue even if Israel returned to its pre-1967 borders and recognized an independent Palestinian state. As Mr. Halkin puts it, Israel "cannot swallow the Palestinians. It cannot drive them out. It cannot arrive at a peaceful settlement with them. All it

can do is disengage itself from them" behind the security fence.

But there is one alternative: calling the Arabs' bluff by accepting the peace plan advanced by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. If Israel is going to withdraw from Gaza and most of the West Bank anyway, as Mr. Halkin believes, why not try to do so as part of an agreement with the greater Arab states? The premise of Abdullah's plan is to end external Arab support for Palestinian irredentism. The Arab League has endorsed it. Why not find out if they really mean it?

THOMAS W. LIPPMAN
*Middle East Institute
Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin writes: "After four years of being the target of unremitting Palestinian terror, Israel does not owe the Palestinians anything except the obligation to let them live their own

lives, free of Israeli domination and control."

In fact, Israeli "domination and control" of the Palestinian Arabs ended years ago, long before the second *intifada* was launched in the fall of 2000. Following the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993, Israel withdrew from the city of Jericho and almost all of the Gaza Strip (1994), from all of the large Arab-populated cities in Judea and Samaria (1995), and then from 85 percent of Hebron (1997). More than 98 percent of Palestinian Arabs today live under the Palestinian Authority.

That the Palestinians continue to wage war against Israel, despite being given control over so much territory and receiving billions of dollars in international aid (over \$1 billion from the U.S. alone), demonstrates that their goal is not to establish a state alongside Israel—something Ehud Barak offered them in 2000—but

rather to destroy the Jewish state.

MORTON A. KLEIN
*Zionist Organization of
America
Merion, Pennsylvania*

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin provides a lengthy history of the Left-Right debate in Israel over how to deal with the land and the Arabs in it. The only problem is that the Arabs were never part of the discussion. Their refusal to accept Israel's existence and to abide by the numerous carefully crafted agreements has made the internal Israeli debate beside the point.

The concept of "separation" is, of course, a total mirage, not the product of a right-wing epiphany. It is the creation of essentially one man—a misguided Ariel Sharon—and it has no possibility of long-term success, any more than all the other false treaties and land giveaways that have backfired in Israel's face. These self-induced illusions have

succeeded only in placing Israel in today's awful position.

Israel's job, like that of any country in the world, is to defend its people and its land. No one else will assume that responsibility, or should.

JEROME S. KAUFMAN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin provides ideological support for Ariel Sharon's plan, but his assumption that disengagement represents the most advantageous solution for Israel at this time fails to account for many facts on the ground that bode ill for it.

Israel will still have to deal with a Palestinian terrorist infrastructure that could grow stronger in Israel's absence from the local scene. The separated Palestinian territories could find it easier to import advanced weaponry with the potential to inflict severe damage on the large population centers around Jerusalem and along the coast. While the security fence will certainly decrease the number of suicide bombings in Israel, as it already has done, no wall is impermeable.

A "disengaged" Israel will be hampered in its ability to conduct crucial security operations in the territories. And when Israel conducts these operations, as inevitably it will have to do, the international outcry over the "aggression" against Palestinian "sovereignty" will dwarf today's fierce anti-Israel rhetoric, even if the Palestinians do not have a state.

Also to be considered is the Palestinians' view of disengagement. Mr. Halkin has himself argued that Israel's ill-conceived withdrawal from southern

Lebanon in the face of Hizbullah guerrillas emboldened the Palestinians to launch the current *intifada*. They may well see disengagement as their own victory in this effort. Should Israel be willing to grant them such a victory?

In the end, disengagement does not address the fundamental problem—the Palestinian ambition to destroy the Jewish state. Following President Bush's initiative, Israel must instead work to ensure that the institutions of Palestinian society develop upon civilized foundations. The real debate should be over how to accomplish this.

DAVID A. COHEN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin's "Does Sharon Have a Plan?" presents a thoughtful analysis of past partition plans. But the latest such plan, Ariel Sharon's "disengagement" policy, is more problematic than he allows.

Under the Sharon plan, Israel will not fully "disengage." Already, during Sharon's term in office, the number of work permits issued to Palestinians from Gaza alone has doubled, from 40,000 to 80,000. More importantly, disengagement will do nothing to end Palestinian incitement to terrorism. This fundamental problem cannot be solved by piecemeal, local maneuvers, but it also cannot be ignored. A society that tolerates murder is a threat to our entire civilization.

MOSHE DANN
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin argues persuasively that the ultimate

intention of Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan is for Israel to withdraw from most of Judea and Samaria, thus finally bringing about the "partition" of Palestine into Jewish and Arab territories. But he fails to take into account the one factor that makes any such partition impossible.

Even a total withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza will leave Israel with a large and growing Arab population among its citizens that is increasingly hostile to the Jewish state. Israeli Arabs by and large do not accept their minority status in Israel but aim, whether through peaceful or other means, to see the country transformed, first into a "state of all its citizens" and then into "a state integrated into the area"—meaning an Arab-dominated state both culturally and politically.

In this light, partition becomes for the Jews a senseless sacrifice, not simply of parts of their historic homeland but of the efforts of over 200,000 Jews to build their homes in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.

No one, Arab or Jew, should be forced to leave his home. If there is to be a real political solution to the conflict, it must come, as Mr. Halkin suggests, through the recognition of one Arab state whose political center is Jordan. That state must include among its citizens the Arabs of Israel.

SHALOM FREEDMAN
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin writes that the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli war ended with "77 percent of Palestine in Jewish hands." He then writes, apropos of today, that "since [unilateral Israeli withdrawal] would

involve Israeli retention of parts of the West Bank, it would leave the Jewish state with upward of 80 percent of Palestine." This is a strange error-by-omission for one so knowledgeable as Mr. Halkin.

The 1920 San Remo conference recognized Great Britain's mandate in Palestine to encompass what are now Jordan, Israel, the Golan Heights, the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), and the Gaza Strip. The conference also affirmed Britain's 1917 Balfour Declaration, favoring a "national home" in Palestine for the Jewish people.

A year after San Remo, Britain closed the area east of the Jordan River to Jewish settlement (but not the area west of it to accelerating Arab migration). In 1922, Britain—its mandate now confirmed by the League of Nations—unilaterally created Transjordan on 77.5 percent of the original mandate land. The following year, it transferred the Golan Heights to the French mandate for Syria.

This being the case, Israel in 1949 ended up with 17.5 percent of mandate Palestine. The West Bank and Gaza Strip are the remaining unallocated, disputed 5 percent.

Whatever the advantages and disadvantages of Ariel Sharon's plan, and whether or not it is time (as Mr. Halkin sees it) "to reexamine the commonplace that the Palestinians need to have their own state, which has become such a shibboleth of contemporary . . . discourse," it must be stressed that mandate Palestine has already been partitioned into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. Whatever the apportionment of the final 5



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ERIC ROZENMAN
*Committee for Accuracy in
Middle East Reporting in
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Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin attributes the Likud party's rejection of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan in part to "a disciplined and well-financed settler movement," which "campaigned massively on behalf of a 'No' vote." But the opposition was by no means limited to settlers.

Indeed, the identification of the "No" campaign with the settlers burdened it with the powerful adverse image of settlers as the "others" of Israeli society, the tail that wags the dog. That burden was dramatically increased by Sharon's assurance to President Bush that he would deliver an exit from Gaza. Supporters of the pull-out were thus able to blame the settlers, with their "No" vote, for allegedly endangering the paramount U.S.-Israel relationship.

As for Mr. Halkin's broader question, whether Sharon "has a plan," there was no previous indication that, for instance, the prime minister intended to give Egypt the role it now seems to have in insuring the peace. Evidently the "plan" was to improvise without consultation.

JOSEPH LERNER
*Independent Media Review &
Analysis (IMRA)*
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

In an article in an international "peace journal" several years ago, I offered

a set of radical proposals for settling the Palestinian/Israeli dispute. In doing so I drew upon a principle of symmetry and reciprocity strikingly similar to that outlined by Hillel Halkin in his thoughtful article. The plan I outlined, however, would go one huge step beyond Halkin to allow both Palestinians and Israelis to realize simultaneously much of their respective national dreams.

At the heart of the plan was the idea that Israel/Palestine would consist of two ethnically defined political entities, each with its own territorial base, but these territorial entities would together constitute a single unified settlement community. Jews, even those in West Bank and Gaza settlements, would be citizens of Israel. Arabs, regardless of their residence, would be citizens of the West Bank/Gaza Palestinian state, with those who are currently citizens of Israel required to transfer their citizenship, national identity, and national voting rights, but not their residence.

Under this plan, Jews could not only keep their settlements in the territories of the Palestinian state but could expand their size and number. Palestinian Arabs would have the right (within certain stipulated numerical limits and ground rules) to settle in Israel.

Each side would thus get what it most wants: an ethnically secure Jewish state for Jews, an ethnically secure Palestinian state for Palestinian Arabs, a right of return to their ancestral homeland for Palestinians, and a right of settlement in the West Bank and Gaza for Jews. Once the political situation was secured, social

and economic cooperation between the populations would follow.

This would be a much better deal for both peoples than any other proposal I have seen, and much more likely to lead to lasting peace. An arrangement at least something like that suggested by Mr. Halkin and myself needs to be discussed at length.

RUSS NIELI
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

As Hillel Halkin pithily puts it, the best Israel can do vis-à-vis the Palestinians is to "disengage" from them. I want to offer two observations, the first regarding the spirit and therefore the form of the disengagement, and the second about the failure of the "land-for-peace" formula.

To many both in Israel and the Arab world, Sharon's plan to withdraw from a number of settlements amounts to a "signal" of Israeli defeat and a victory for Arab violence. They are right that signals are important. But being overly preoccupied with signals sends its own pernicious signal—namely, that one is more concerned with sending messages than in imposing one's will on the conflict.

Ultimately, the nature of the message received by the Arabs will turn on the spirit behind the action being taken. In my own view, much if not everything depends on the degree to which Israelis become inwardly reconciled to the continuing existential struggle with the Palestinian Arabs and abandon any hope of a conclusion to it in the foreseeable future.

Armed with that knowledge, they will be able to see their way past two post-1967 policies and forward to a successful disengagement.

For some Israelis, the original motive behind establishing the most isolated and vulnerable Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza was the hope that one day communities of Jews could live safely in an Arab Palestine; for others, the settlements were useful tokens, to be surrendered as part of a final settlement that was itself not far in the offing. Neither prospect is any longer worth pursuing. At the same time, other, less isolated settlements should be more securely incorporated into Israel proper, specifically three in northern Gaza adjacent to the 1967 border.

Next, there is no sense in further attempts at generosity, cooperation, and normalcy, or in continuing the natural economic integration between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In particular, the existing arrangements for supplying electricity, water, and fuel, and for granting access to the Israeli labor market, should be terminated. These have probably been the most morally damaging of Israel's policies, telling the Palestinians in effect that they are permitted to wage war against Israel while watching television reports of the conflict with electricity provided by Israeli power plants.

Near the end of his article, Mr. Halkin makes the normative point that Palestinians have a far weaker claim to a state than numerous other peoples to whose case the world turns a deaf ear. The point can be illustrated with positive

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evidence from the history of land-for-peace.

Some supporters of Israel have come to the sad conclusion that the land-for-peace formula failed because the Arabs do not want peace. That is true enough. But they misunderstand the formula, which made sense only if based on the proposition that what the Arabs really wanted was land; the idea, in fact, was that they would get land and the Israelis would get peace.

That being so, the rather shocking fact revealed by the failure of the land-for-peace formula is that the Palestinian Arabs do not want land, either. For if they did want land of sufficient size to establish a homeland that could rapidly evolve into a sovereign state, and if they wanted it with anything approaching the passion with which the Jews longed for a Jewish state, they would have shown themselves willing to make substantial sacrifices and compromises to achieve it.

One used to hear the argument that there was no Palestinian nationality *per se*—and that, to the extent that a pale imitation of one could be said to exist, it already had a state, namely, Jordan. This was not merely a self-serving Jewish invention. In 1948, Folke Bernadotte, the UN negotiator in the Arab-Israeli dispute, wrote in his diary that “The ‘Palestinian’ Arabs have at present no will of their own. Neither have they ever developed any specifically ‘Palestinian’ nationalism. The demand for a separate Arab state in Israel is consequently relatively weak. It would seem as though in existing cir-

cumstances most of the ‘Palestinian’ Arabs would be quite content to be incorporated into Transjordan.”

Understandably enough, latter-day Palestinian apologists have striven to present a decidedly different image, one of a unique and long-suffering nation entitled to a state of its own. Where, then, are we to go from here? In the fullness of time, no doubt, this dispute will resolve itself, either peaceably or not. But one lesson we should draw for the here and now is that it is naive to think that seeking peace aggressively will make peace more likely.

LLOYD COHEN
*George Mason University
School of Law
Arlington, Virginia*

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Several readers have stated why they believe that a unilateral Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and most of the West Bank to a defensible security fence is not a good idea. I shall try to answer them briefly.

Thomas W. Lippman wants to know why, if Israel is going to withdraw from most of the occupied territories anyway, it does not first test whether the Arab League countries “really mean” their endorsement of the Saudi peace plan. I do not think Israel should do this for the simple reason that I do not think the Saudi plan is good for Israel. That plan calls for a more or less total withdrawal to the 1967 armistice lines, which I am against; for the dismantlement of all or nearly all of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, which I am also against; and for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the territories that are withdrawn from—

which, too, is something that, given the current nature of Palestinian society and politics, would not be in Israel’s interest.

I would be interested in hearing Mr. Lippman explain just why he believes that “the premise of [Saudi Crown Prince] Abdullah’s plan is to end external Arab support for Palestinian irredentism.” Suppose that, as is probable, a Palestinian state along Israel’s 1967 borders raised irredentist claims. What makes Mr. Lippman so sure that the Arab League, or any of its members, would then support Israel against the Palestinians? Is it not far more likely that they would support the Palestinians against Israel, as they have always done in the past?

Morton A. Klein, Jerome S. Kaufman, David A. Cohen, and Moshe Dann all argue that unilateral disengagement will not work because the Palestinians will not accept it and will continue to attack Israel from their side of the unilaterally determined border. This may indeed turn out to be the case. But even if it does, Israel’s situation would be far better than it is now.

That is so, in the first place, because Israel can more easily defend itself against long-range Palestinian rocket or artillery attacks than against suicide bombs and terrorists in its midst; in the second place, because any separation is desirable that eliminates everyday friction between the Israeli army and West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, and that puts an end to a situation in which Israel is forced to impose innumerable decisions and restrictions on Palestinians who are not its citizens; in the third place, because if

Israel fails to take such steps, its international position will continue to deteriorate; and finally and most importantly, because Israel’s ultimate survival is threatened as much by demographic dangers as it is by military ones, if not more so.

Already now, close to 50 percent of the combined population of pre-1967 Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip is Palestinian, and the Palestinian birth rate, which is one of the highest in the world, will continue steadily to tip the scale in the Palestinians’ favor. If unilateral disengagement is out, and no bilateral agreement is possible with a Palestinian leadership that seeks Israel’s destruction, what exactly do Messrs. Klein, Kaufman, Cohen, and Dann propose doing to prevent Jews from becoming a rapidly shrinking minority west of the Jordan?

This brings us to Shalom Freedman’s proposition that disengagement will solve no demographic problems since, even after it, Israel will still have to deal with a large and hostile Arab minority in its midst. Although frequently voiced by territorial maximalists in Israel, this argument is just plain silly; it is a little like saying that since even a few poison mushrooms can kill you, you might as well gorge yourself on huge amounts of them. Mr. Freedman is correct in observing that a severe problem could one day be presented by the over one million Palestinian Arabs living within the territory of pre-1967 Israel plus the West Bank areas that will be annexed by the security fence. He is being absurd when he concludes



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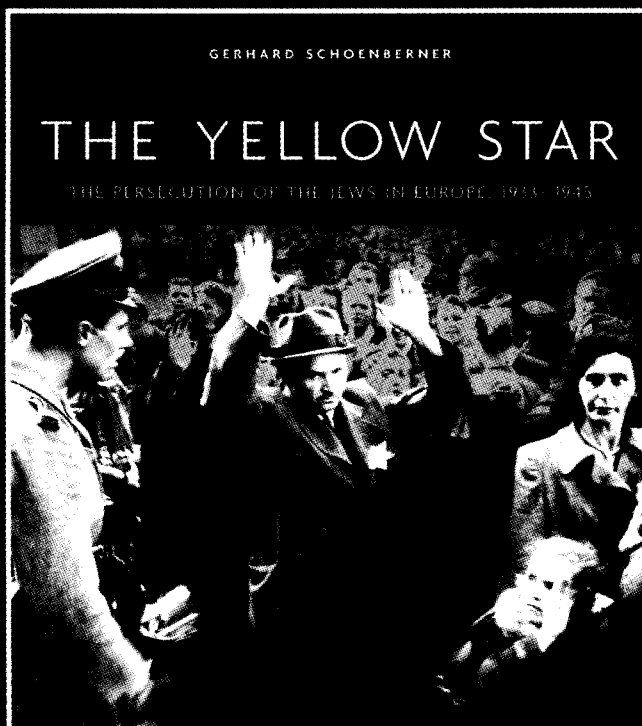
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that, this being so, Israel might as well cleave to borders that contain close to 5 million Palestinians.

I am getting a little tired of hearing the old charge of the Zionist Right, put forth again here by Eric Rozenman, that the state of Israel occupies only a small part of "Palestine," most of which was torn away from the Jews in 1922 by the British creation of Transjordan. You cannot tear something away from someone who has never possessed it. In 1922, there was not a single Jew permanently domiciled in Transjordan; nor had there been a single Jewish community there since ancient times. Indeed, even in antiquity the Jewish presence east of the Jordan was sparse and of no particular historical or religious importance to the Jewish people. I can assure Mr. Rozenman that, even if Transjordan had remained part of the British Mandate and open to Zionist settlement, such settlement would have been so scanty that it would have been quickly overrun by the Arabs in the 1948-49 war, just as were parts of Palestine west of the Jordan in which no or few Jews lived.

Since I never said that opposition within the Likud to Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan was "limited to settlers," I am not sure what Joseph Lerner's point is; surely he does not dispute that the settler movement mobilized massively—as was its democratic right—to campaign for a "No" vote in the Likud referendum. Nor do I agree with Mr. Lerner about Sharon's assessment of Egypt's role in policing Gaza and its borders after an Israeli withdrawal. My own sense is that, from the very

beginning, Sharon envisioned unilateral disengagement as pulling both Jordan and Egypt back into the occupied territories evacuated by Israel, thus putting an end to the specter of an irredentist Palestinian state.

Russ Nieli and I have exchanged views in COMMENTARY in the past (see "Letters from Readers," October 2002), and I will say again that his vision of an Israeli-Palestinian federation, in which citizens of each state would be free to live in the other and to move freely between the two, is one that I find congenial and have written in favor of. Alas, it is a vision that four years of concerted Palestinian terror have reduced to shreds, and that strikes me at the moment as purely utopian.

I thank Lloyd Cohen for his letter. There is nothing in it with which I disagree.

Tax Cuts

TO THE EDITOR:

Bruce Bartlett's defense of the Bush tax cuts is considerably more subtle and compelling than the spin coming out of the Bush White House, which Mr. Bartlett, to his credit, concedes to be incoherent ["Explaining the Bush Tax Cuts," June]. But this is like saying that Patrick Buchanan's analysis of Middle Eastern politics is more subtle than that of Saddam Hussein's former information minister. With so low a baseline for comparison, even a dramatic improvement leaves us far below the desired level.

Mr. Bartlett commits a number of medium-sized

analytical errors and one giant conceptual error. The Bush tax-cut proposals coincided with the appearance in the late 1990's of huge projected budget surpluses. "Conservatives were wary of these predictions," Mr. Bartlett writes, "fearing that surpluses would lead to massive new government spending." But it was Democrats and moderate liberals who suspected that the projected surpluses were too good to be true. Conservatives not only defended the projected surpluses as accurate, they insisted that the projections were *too small*. When questioned in 2001 about the possibility that surpluses might prove chimerical, White House budget director Mitch Daniels said, "Well, we really can't miss here. . . . We've been underestimating revenue by as much as \$80 billion a year. And we are likely to continue doing that."

In his major economic speech of 2001, Bush himself cleverly spoke of his uses of the surplus in the past tense: "We have increased our budget at a responsible 4 percent, we have funded our priorities, we have paid down all the available debt, we have prepared for contingencies, and we still have money left over"—as if the money had already flowed into the Treasury. In the Democratic response, House minority leader Richard Gephardt warned that Bush was not realistically accounting for his own spending plans, and was leaving no room for the possibility of an economic downturn or military emergency. Those fears were vindicated in spades.

Mr. Bartlett likewise defends the distribution of the

Bush tax cuts, citing the fact that the richest 20 percent of Americans now pay only a slightly smaller share of federal income and payroll taxes. This statistic, while less misleading than, say, Bush's ludicrous insistence that "by far the vast majority of my tax cuts go to the bottom end of the spectrum," is still misleading. Not only does it omit Bush's repeal of the estate tax, which is paid entirely by the very wealthy, but it obscures the fact that the greatest benefits of the tax cuts fall to the richest 1 percent, whose share of the federal tax burden will decrease by about a tenth by 2010.

Mr. Bartlett does not entirely deny the distributional effects of the Bush tax cuts. Rather, he argues, "With the tax burden skewed so heavily toward the rich, it is simply impossible to reduce that burden in a way that is not similarly skewed toward the rich." Impossible? In 2001, left-wing Democrats proposed giving everybody who pays taxes a \$350 refund. If that seems too Marxist, we could simply reduce the rate paid by the bottom tax bracket or reduce the rates for all the tax brackets. Mr. Bartlett's claim that it is impossible to cut taxes without having distributional results similar to those brought about by Bush is simply false.

Mr. Bartlett's biggest failure is his attempt to explain away deficits. Republicans generally make two main defenses against the charge of deficit-mongering. The first is that tax cuts, by reducing revenues, will "starve the beast," forcing commensurate reductions in spending. As Mr. Bartlett concedes, this argument is nonsense. Spending slowed

after George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton raised taxes in an attempt to restore fiscal discipline; only after George W. Bush convinced Congress to throw away its inhibitions did spending rise again.

The second GOP defense, which contradicts the first, is that tax cuts will permanently raise economic growth to so great an extent that revenues will actually rise. Somehow, there are supply-siders who still believe this, even after they predicted in unison that Clinton's 1993 tax hike would cripple the economy and cause revenues to drop. But Mr. Bartlett does not argue for magical revenue growth, either.

Mr. Bartlett's only defense on this point is to pooh-pooh the effect that deficits have in driving up interest rates. The relationship between deficits and interest rates is an economic truism, as even Greg Mankiw, the Harvard economist appointed by Bush to head the Council on Economic Advisors, has conceded. "Interest rates are determined by so many different factors," Mr. Bartlett argues, "that it is absurd to think that the deficit is the overriding influence." But nobody claims that deficits are the "overriding" factor, just that they are *a* factor.

Even if this were not true, Mr. Bartlett ignores altogether the even more important fiscal logic. Bush has reduced taxes far below what is sufficient to pay for what even a government under unified conservative Republican control wants to spend. In 2004, federal spending accounted for 20 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), which is not unusually high. Federal revenues, by con-

trast, accounted for 15.8 percent of GDP, which is the lowest percentage since 1950. Economic growth should bring that figure up, but without corrective action, it will not come anywhere close to matching outlays. Bush has left us with a tax system that, into perpetuity, will raise several hundred billion dollars less than the government will spend.

Spending must be paid for somehow. If we do not pay for it through taxes, our children will pay for it with interest. It is perfectly clear why the administration would desire such an outcome: why not foist the bill for their spending onto taxpayers who will be voting long after Bush has left office? What is not clear, and what Mr. Bartlett does not even attempt to explain, is why anybody who has the national interest in mind would agree.

JONATHAN CHAIT
The New Republic
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Bruce Bartlett's paean to the Bush tax cuts argues that they will have little effect on long-term deficits and will promote long-term growth; that their benefits have been distributed equitably; and that they represent tax reform. We disagree on all three counts.

If the tax cuts are made permanent (and not gradually erased by the effects of the Alternative Minimum Tax), they will add \$3.7 trillion in deficits over the next ten years. More importantly, they will worsen the already grim long-term budget picture. The Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center has found that over the next

75 years—the period customarily used to assess Social Security's finances—the cost of the tax cuts will be three to five times the entire Social Security shortfall. The tax cuts just for the *top 1 percent* of households will be as large as the entire Social Security shortfall.

Mr. Bartlett's assertion that the tax cuts will promote long-term growth does not stand up, either. Several of the tax cuts, such as the reductions in marginal rates, might modestly promote growth *if they were paid for*. But they are not, and consequently will swell the deficit. Studies conducted by the Brookings Institution, the Federal Reserve, the Congressional Budget Office, and Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation have found that the growth-reducing effects of the enlarged deficits will cancel out most or all of the tax cuts' growth-promoting effects.

Mr. Bartlett's defense of the fairness of the tax cuts is also misleading. When describing the effect of the tax cuts on the share of taxes that high-income individuals pay, he leaves out the effects of repealing the estate tax, which benefits only the very affluent. In addition, he ignores the best measure of a tax cut's effects on different income groups: its impact on after-tax income. The Bush cuts make the distribution of after-tax income more unequal by giving the vast bulk of their benefits to wealthy households.

Moreover, since the tax cuts cannot be deficit-financed forever, they ultimately will have to be paid for through some combination of budget cuts and tax increases. Under almost any

approach likely to be adopted, the bottom 80 percent of the population will end up as net losers. They will lose more from the measures adopted to pay for the tax cuts than they gain from the tax cuts themselves. Only the top 20 percent will come out ahead.

Finally, Mr. Bartlett's claim that the tax cuts represent tax reform—helping to move the nation from an income tax to a consumption tax—rings hollow. The goal of a consumption tax is to raise national saving, which is the sum of private saving and public saving. Though the Bush tax cuts may modestly increase private saving, they will substantially reduce public saving by swelling the deficit, and the net effect on national saving will be negative.

What the tax cuts really represent is a shift from a tax on most forms of income, including the investment income of the affluent, toward a tax under which all wages are taxed but much investment income is sheltered. This is a shift we do not regard as "reform."

ROBERT GREENSTEIN
Center on Budget and Policy
Priorities
Washington, D.C.

PETER R. ORSZAG
The Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C.

BRUCE BARTLETT writes:

Jonathan Chait says that "Democrats and moderate liberals . . . suspected that the projected surpluses were too good to be true," while conservatives "insisted that the projections were too small." When evaluating this claim, it is important to keep the timing straight. Before George W. Bush took

office, the Clinton administration and most liberals were more than happy to project massive surpluses as far as the eye could see. It was only after Bush took office that liberals and Democrats suddenly decided that Clinton's projections were suspect.

In the last Clinton budget, issued on January 16, 2001, there is no suggestion of an economic slowdown ahead. The White House predicted real annual growth of 3.2 percent in the gross domestic product over the next ten years, and projected massive and growing budget surpluses. The surplus was expected to rise from \$236 billion in fiscal year 2000 to \$256 billion in 2001, to \$277 billion in 2002, and to continue rising every year of the forecast period, reaching \$810 billion in 2011. The entire national debt was projected to be paid off by 2009.

It is also worth remembering that the Clinton administration had made substantial errors in budget estimates over the previous five years, projecting revenues well below what the Treasury actually received. Between 1996 and 2000, revenues came in \$850 billion higher than estimated.

The point I made in my article is that by the time then-candidate Bush put forward his tax plan in December 1999, it was perfectly reasonable to think that large budget surpluses had become the norm. Even by the time he took office, it was still a realistic assumption. To its credit, the Bush administration quickly marked down projected real GDP growth for 2001 to 2.4 percent—exactly the same as the Congressional Budget Office's estimate. The administra-

tion's long-term forecast was slightly more pessimistic than the "blue chip" consensus of private forecasters.

As it turned out, everyone was wrong. Real GDP ended up dropping by 0.5 percent in 2001. The number of professional forecasters who even got close to predicting this economic reversal can be counted on the fingers of one hand with a couple left over.

It was the recession, more than the 2001 tax cut, that caused federal revenues to collapse and the surplus to evaporate. Jonathan Chait is trying to pretend, with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, that his side had a better handle on what was to come than in fact was the case. Even if Al Gore had become President and Congress had gone Democratic, some sort of anti-recessionary fiscal program would have been enacted. Under Democrats, it probably would have taken the form of increased government spending, rather than tax cuts, but it likely would have been of the same order of magnitude.

In other words, the choice was never between a continuation of surpluses under Democratic stewardship and Republican deficits caused by tax cuts. It was really between Republican deficits and Democratic deficits, both caused principally by the recession, with the former abetted by tax cuts and the latter by jobs programs.

What really bothers Mr. Chait is not the deficits on Bush's watch but rather the distributional consequences of his tax cuts. This is evident in his singling out for special scorn the phasing out of the estate tax. This tax is and always has been a

trivial contributor to federal revenue—on the order of 1 percent. It exists not to fund government programs but solely to satisfy the envy of those who, rather than allowing someone to become rich, would prefer that no one become rich.

Mr. Chait's obsession with the distributional consequences of tax policy, rather than with its impact on revenues, is confirmed by his disagreement with my contention that one cannot cut taxes without benefiting the rich. I was simply noting that whether one looks only at the income tax or also at the payroll tax, the vast bulk of all federal taxes are paid by those generally considered to be rich.

I overstated the point somewhat by saying it is "impossible" to cut taxes without benefiting the rich. Today, unfortunately, it is possible to have "negative" tax cuts, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, that send "refunds" to people who have no tax liability. But this is just government spending disguised as a tax cut. To the average person, benefiting from a "tax cut" implies that one actually pays taxes. And any kind of across-the-board tax cut will benefit people in proportion to the amount of taxes they pay. This will necessarily benefit the wealthy. That was my point.

Finally, Mr. Chait raises the bugaboo of deficits. Of course, deficits are a function of both lower revenue and/or higher spending. Since I dealt only with Bush's tax policy, I did not address the spending side. Clearly, the recession and terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed this situation drastically and would have done so even if Al Gore

had been President on that day. But Mr. Chait has a point when he says that Bush and the Republican Congress have raised spending well in excess of what could reasonably be justified. He is right that deficits no longer seem to restrain spending as they did in the 1980's, though it was, until recently, a reasonable assumption to make.

Mr. Chait's concern for the effect of deficits on interest rates is simply baseless. Nowhere do I say that deficits have no effect; only that their impact tends to be grossly overblown. The most recent research, published by Glenn Hubbard of Columbia University and Eric Engen of the American Enterprise Institute in the National Bureau of Economic Research's prestigious *Macroeconomics Annual*, estimates that an increase in the public debt of 1 percent of GDP (\$110 billion) would raise the long-term interest rate by 3 basis points (0.03 percent). This sounds about right to me.

Mr. Chait is right that we now have a fundamental structural imbalance between revenues and outlays that must be addressed. But the problem is as much on the spending side as on the tax side. Spending is not his concern, however. Mr. Chait's desire is to spend even more as long as it is paid for by higher taxes on the rich. That is really the substance of his letter.

Robert Greenstein and Peter R. Orszag share many of Mr. Chait's concerns, but they carry them to an absurd extreme. They project Bush's tax cuts out for 75 years as if they are set in concrete and no future Congress or President can

alter them in any way. Then they compare the tax cuts to Social Security in a way that implies a linkage between the two where none exists. The only purpose of such an analysis is to score cheap political points by making seniors worry unnecessarily about their future benefits.

In the end, Messrs. Chait, Greenstein, and Orszag are not arguing with what I wrote but rather with what President Bush did. While I am generally sympathetic to his tax cuts, I am not by any means an enthusiastic supporter of every aspect of them. If it were up to me, I would have done things a lot differently—perhaps in ways more agreeable to my critics.

My main purpose in the article was to explain the logic of the Bush tax cuts in a way that Bush himself has never done. I think the President would have helped himself if he had laid out a vision for tax policy so that people could see how the pieces fit together. Absent such a vision, it is much easier for his opponents to assume the worst—that he is only interested in starving the government, slashing aid to the poor, rewarding the Republican party's rich contributors, etc.

I cannot be sure that my analysis of the Bush tax cuts is correct, but I am certain that my critics are wrong in theirs.

The Fight in Iraq

TO THE EDITOR:

Victor Davis Hanson has overlooked the central

element of America's continuing troubles in Iraq: the fact that the Iraqis have not surrendered ["Do We Have Enough Troops in Iraq?," June]. As Carl von Clausewitz wrote: surrender "is an essential part of the victory. It is this part alone which acts upon the public opinion outside the army, upon the people and the government in both belligerent states, and upon all others in any way concerned."

The American military's destruction of Saddam Hussein's government made it impossible, certainly, to find an Iraqi authority that could surrender. But this also made it all the more incumbent upon Pentagon war-planners, bent on "regime change" from the outset, to demonstrate to the Iraqi people that the United States was firmly in control of their country. Such a demonstration could only be made by deploying sufficient troops to kill or capture fleeing Republican Guard units, deter looting, destroy or disable Saddam's vast stockpiles of ordnance, and inhibit guerrilla insurrection.

Do we have enough troops in Iraq? The answer is a resounding no.

JAMES G. COLLINS
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

If military history demonstrates anything, it is that small, well-trained, and highly motivated forces can defeat much larger enemies. As Victor Davis Hanson notes, they can even develop reputations for ferocity that allow them successfully to occupy large territories and populations. Unfortunately, the Amer-

ican military is unlikely to develop such a reputation, despite its evident power and quality.

The West's current obsession with minimizing casualties and battle damage on *both sides* undercuts any chance that our opponents will see U.S. troops as ferocious. Formidable, competent, technically sophisticated, yes. Ferocious, no. If anything, the Iraq campaign is moving the American military ethos even further from the direction that Mr. Hanson, rightly, would have it go.

In Falluja, the Marines may have wanted to fight initially, but reports indicate that commanders, proclaiming success, instead put the best face possible on their non-confrontational tactics. Indeed, the Marines in Falluja largely copied Israel's cautious tactics in dealing with Palestinian combatants in Gaza, tactics that have steadily eroded Israel's martial image.

Mr. Hanson knows as well as anybody the role that psychology played in the military operations of antiquity. Celts adorned their mounts with the severed heads of foes, and Huns deliberately mutilated their own faces to intimidate and frighten their enemies. We, by contrast, have Psy-Ops units and thousands of military lawyers.

JONATHAN F. KEILER
Bowie, Maryland

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON writes:

I agree in part with these correspondents about our lapses in using our forces to the full extent. How could I not? In my writings I have warned ad

nauseam about the fallacy of not dealing firmly with looters, insurgents, and terrorists in their chrysalis stages. In earlier essays in COMMENTARY, I worried that the enemy did not yet feel defeated or humiliated, and that in his post-bellum reckoning it appeared much safer to blow up at a distance an American peacekeeper than it had been to fight a soldier on the battlefield. In my most recent article, I argued explicitly that our problem was not how many troops we had but rather how we used—or rather did not use—them.

So, yes, James G. Collins is correct that we have not yet put the Baathists, Mahdists, or any other antagonists in the position of asking for our terms—although in both Falluja and Najaf it was in our power to do so. But this lapse is still different from the question of troop numbers. Najaf could be taken by 3,000 American soldiers or by 3,000,000—but only if they were allowed to do so.

Jonathan F. Keiler grasps the point that, in the amoral world of war, purported leniency and magnanimity, if premature (i.e., antedating the defeat of the enemy), only result in getting even more people killed on both sides. The Pentagon has not yet figured out how to reconcile the increasing lethality of its forces with the commensurately increasing pressures to restrict their use. However much we caricature the global media, domestic utopians, or self-appointed international watchdog groups, they really do seem to affect American public

opinion, at least as filtered through our own mainstream media.

In short, I plead guilty in both the past and the present to voicing concern over just the paradoxes that Mr. Collins and Mr. Keiler point to, though perhaps without the authority of Clausewitz or the imagery of severed heads.

Hits & Flops

TO THE EDITOR:

"Clearly, this is not the track record of a flourishing theatrical medium," writes Terry Teachout, noting that seven of the fourteen Broadway musicals he reviewed for the *Wall Street Journal* over the past year had either closed or announced their intention to do so ["Is the Musical Comedy Dead?," June]. Mr. Teachout goes on to argue that this compares unfavorably with the "golden age" of the Broadway musical, roughly 1940-65, or from *Pal Joey* to *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Does it really? For all the treasures it left us—*Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Music Man*, *Gypsy*, and others—Broadway's "golden age" was also an era of flops, schlock, and failures. The same year (1944) that gave us *On the Town*, for instance, also gave us 20 performances of *Allah Be Praised!* Of the 274 Broadway musicals that opened between 1943 and 1964, only 27, or fewer than 10 percent, could be certified as "mega-hits" that ran for more than 750 performances. By contrast, nearly 30 percent—80 shows—lasted for fewer than 51 performances, and only 92 passed the threshold of 300 perfor-

mances to qualify as even minor hits.

To be sure, the flops included shows, like *Candide*, later to be considered classics, while the hits included widely acknowledged failures like Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro*. But this just confirms that historical staying power cannot necessarily be discerned in the present.

No doubt there are recent Broadway musicals that one day will be admired as classics and revived again and again, both professionally and by amateur companies of college and community theaters. In my judgment, such future classics include *Ragtime*, *The Producers*, and *Hairspray*, to name only three, while *Rent*, *Aida*, and *The Boy from Oz* will become historical curiosities. But, of course, I could be wrong.

RICHARD E. SINCERE, JR.
Metro Herald
Alexandria, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout characterizes *Taboo* as a "jukebox" musical. In fact it was a new musical, and as such it won a 2003-4 Tony Award for Best Score. Not that this would have changed the gloomy tone of Mr. Teachout's article, which in the opinion of this audience member is somewhat overstated for dramatic effect and is brimming with an outdated longing for the past.

JOHN KEVIN JONES
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

As a longtime fan of both the musical theater and Terry Teachout, I was excited to read "Is the Musical Theater Dead?" I certainly agree with Mr. Teachout that contemporary lyricists and composers are generally un-

able to match the quality achieved by the greats of the 1930's-60's. I also find some merit in his assessment of the inferior "ideology" of recent musicals as opposed to the classics.

But I would point to what I consider an even more crucial failing by the creators of contemporary musical theater: their inability to create great characters. It is the characters that draw audience members into a story and lead them to care about what happens in that story. This is true in film, in television, and it is certainly true in theater.

In addition to excellent scores and a positive outlook, the classic musicals cited by Mr. Teachout generally have great characters at their center: Nathan Detroit, Annie Oakley, Tevye, Henry Higgins, Harold Hill, and the like. Not so, most current musicals—although, going beyond the most recent season, I would cite both *The Producers* and *Hairspray* as exceptions: two huge hits, quite enjoyable to watch, neither one of which had an especially good score but both of which bucked the trend by presenting compelling characters.

Finally, I happen to think that Stephen Sondheim's scores equal and sometimes even surpass those of the classic musicals. But they often fail to engage audiences emotionally, and the reason may again be the absence of compelling characters. *Sweeney Todd*, arguably his best work, is not coincidentally the exception. If one counts *Gypsy*, to which he contributed the lyrics, as a "Sondheim" show, the point is underlined further.

MICHAEL KAPLAN
Calabasas, California

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

Like Richard E. Sincere, I, too, could be wrong, but I cannot imagine that *Ragtime*, *The Producers*, or *Hairspray* will ever be regarded as "classic" musicals, and not least because their scores are unmemorable. As for the comparatively high incidence of "flops, schlock, and failures" among musicals of what I call the "golden age," what is so surprising about that? In the theater—or in any other artistic medium, for that matter—a long-term batting average of .100 is extraordinary.

Mr. Sincere also errs in supposing that a show that runs for more than 300 performances should be considered a "minor hit." That may be true today, but in Broadway's heyday, when production costs were lower (thus allowing backers to recoup their investments more quickly) and shows were opening like clockwork, a 300-performance run was thought to be highly successful.

In any case, the relevant comparison between then and now is with *new* musicals, not revivals. Judged by that standard, Broadway has just weathered a disastrous season.

Which brings me to John Kevin Jones. As he is surely aware, *Taboo* was a "new" musical only in the sense that it was not a revival. Its score consisted of preexisting pop songs by Boy George, which made it as much of a "jukebox" musical as, say, *Movin' Out* or *Mamma Mia!* The standards by which shows become eligible for specific Tony categories, as is well known on and off Broadway, are highly flexible. As for my "outdated longing for the past," it is not so chronic as to prevent me from praising such engaging new shows as

Avenue Q, just as I would hope that Mr. Jones's preference for the present is not so rigid as to lead him in turn to favor such tiresome drivel as *Taboo*.

Michael Kaplan makes an interesting point. My own feeling, however, is that a well-written book with compelling characters is merely an enabling condition for a good musical—that is, it is absolutely necessary but not sufficient in and of itself to ensure long-term artistic success. It is true that engaging, well-cast shows with second-rate scores can and do become hits. But once again I return to what I take to be the heart of the matter: has any musical comedy with an unmemorable score, no matter how interesting its story line may be, ever had an enduring life in revival? So far as I know, the answer is no.

Gay Marriage

TO THE EDITOR:

My thanks to Kay S. Hymowitz for her characteristically thoughtful re-

view of my book, *Gay Marriage: Why It's Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America* [Books in Review, June]. I fear, though, that she may leave COMMENTARY readers with the misimpression that I deny or disparage the link between marriage and children.

To the contrary, I vigorously affirm that child-rearing—along with providing stable homes and reliable caregivers for adults—is one of marriage's essential and irreplaceable functions. I argue that same-sex marriage will benefit children: indirectly, by reinforcing society's time-honored and amply justified preference for marriage over non-marriage; directly, by providing the hundreds of thousands of children of same-sex couples with the stability and security that only marriage brings.

Indeed, if we want further to disconnect marriage from children, I cannot think of a better way than to require gay couples (more than a quarter of whom are raising children,

according to the 2000 census) to rear them outside of wedlock.

JONATHAN RAUCH
National Journal
Washington, D.C.

KAY S. HYMOWITZ writes:

I appreciate the cordial tone of Jonathan Rauch's letter. My review does point out that *Gay Marriage* speaks of the institution as "uniquely good for children." Although I still fail to see a "vigorous affirmation" that "child-rearing is one of marriage's essential and irreplaceable functions" in the pages of Rauch's book, I welcome his agreement with me on this point.

The problem lies with his definition of marriage: "two people's lifelong commitment recognized by law and society to care for each other." This definition is agnostic on the subject of children. What we have here is far more than an editorial dispute, in which one of us wants to put childrearing in capital letters and the other wants to leave it in a subordinate clause. As I see it, the main problem with gay mar-

riage is that it is founded in an adult-centric vision of the institution; Rauch's definition could be exhibit A.

Few human cultures—other than our own of the last twenty years—would recognize this definition. Marriage evolved as culture's way of ensuring that a child's biological parents would be bound both to the child and to each other. It is precisely because Americans have lost their grasp of this original purpose that we find ourselves with a third of all children born to single mothers and nearly half of all marriages ending in divorce. For if marriage is not primarily about tying a couple to their offspring, then what is wrong with a woman having a child on her own or a couple going their separate ways when things turn sour?

Rauch argues that gay marriage would improve this state of affairs. Given the adult-centrism of gay marriage, which reflects the same impulse that has already helped to weaken the institution, it would make much more sense to fear the opposite.



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Perfection *A Story*

Mark Helprin

EARLY IN June of 1956, the summer in New York burst forth temperate and bright, the colors deep, the wind promising. This was the beginning of the summer that was to see the culmination of a chain of events that had begun, like everything else, at the beginning of the world, but had started in a practical sense in March of the previous year, when the Saromsker Rebbe opened the wrong drawer.

A heavy wet snow had snapped some telephone lines in Brooklyn, many of which at that time were carried on poles above the ground. When these went down, the magnetic effect coursed its way through the webs of copper and steel in the telephone exchanges and made oceans of static that flowed like backwash into every telephone in Brooklyn. The Saromsker Rebbe had intended to use the telephone to propose a meeting with Rabbi Moritz of Breel, who lived on Ocean Parkway with his followers, who trimmed their hats in mink, whereas the Saromskers lived in Williamsburg and trimmed theirs with sable. The Saromsker Rebbe wanted to discuss a theological difference that now appeared reconcilable.

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The Saromskers had taken in many survivors of the Holocaust, mostly children who had been babies when their parents were murdered. Their devotion to mothers and fathers they had never known was fiercer and more concentrated than anyone might have dreamed, except perhaps for the parents themselves in the very moment they were parted from their children. The parents' prayers for the union of souls, and their silent and intense petitioning of God had the strength of all the winds of the world, of its invisible magnetism, of oceans and seas. But they were petitions that, for all their power and urgency, and though perhaps answered in time or beyond the limits of time, were not answered then.

A few of these children had been old enough to remember, some even to have begun serious study before their world was destroyed, and to these the Saromsker Rebbe would listen when, on a point of division, they held that things had changed, that movement was possible, especially in the New World and in the eyes of the young. Thus, soon after the war, the Saromsker Rebbe had swallowed his pride and begun to speak to Rabbi Moritz of Breel, who had also taken in a number of mysteriously intense young refugees. Theological reconciliation moves at a pace that makes the advance and recession of glaciers seem like the oscillation of a gnat in the golden light of a summer evening. Braced for a lifetime of cautious exchanges, the two rabbis had discovered

that the telephone, more urgent even than the telegraph, was the most complimentary way for one to get the full attention of the other.

But because of the snowstorm the telephone was not working, and the only thing audible within it was something much like the experimental music then in vogue, of which neither rabbi had even the slightest inkling. The Saromsker Rebbe held the handset and tapped at the little button on the left side of the base, first three times, and then five. "Hello? Hello?" he said to the static. He repeated this six times over the space of an hour and a half, after which he gave up. Instead of talking on the telephone, he would do what came naturally and what was holy: he would write.

He wanted to write a short note, but with fountain pen in hand the Saromsker Rebbe was a dervish. Possessed of undying momentum and driven not by his own hand but by the ancient operation just of picking up the pen, he filled it, applied it to paper, and began moving it about. It then began to drag him after it like a plowman who had attached himself by a strong harness to a gigantic young plow horse before hitching it up to the plow, which horse was then stung by a big and very angry bee, and had run until he had crossed all of Bessarabia—through rivers, over fields packed with wildflowers so that the plowman emerged looking like a huge bush in full bloom with windmill legs, in long flights off cliffs, through startled towns, breaking fences that exploded like wheat on a threshing floor, through houses, skipping across the decks of boats, following the sun so that its light fueled him and he pulled the plowman without exhaustion. The plowman as he ran shouted prayers, and the horse, having long forgotten the sting, raced the sun as if to overtake it. Horses cannot be expected not to have such notions, or rabbis not to write all night.

In the morning, when the snow had fallen off the wires because of strong winds from the Ramapos, the Saromsker Rebbe found himself with forty densely imprinted pages that left him vibrating like a piano wire and that had to be delivered as soon as possible to Rabbi Moritz of Breel. Shaking not from fatigue but from having followed his pen all night, the rebbe rang his nickel-plated bell, and one of his students, who had just started the day shift outside the study door, instantly appeared.

"I have written a little letter to Rabbi Moritz of Breel," the Saromsker Rebbe said, holding the forty pages up to the light. "It must be delivered to Ocean Parkway as soon as possible. Who is the fastest and most nimble of our students? Who is smart but not

so immersed in his studies that he would be crushed by a truck? Who knows the map, and will be able to come back? Who speaks English well? And who will make a good impression on Rabbi Moritz of Breel?"

The student said, "It's simple."

The Saromsker Rebbe knew that nothing is simple. "Really?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Roger."

"That's a name?"

"That's his American name—Roger Reveshze."

Stepping forward, the student said, "Rabbi, he's so fast he bounces off the walls. He speaks English perfectly, and he will impress Rabbi Moritz of Breel. He's one of the ones from Majdanek."

The children of Majdanek were the cause of many problems. Like other children of other camps they had their terrors and incurable sadnesses, but, for whatever reason, they even more so. For whatever reason, Majdanek was worse.

"He spends a great deal of time praying for his parents. He was just old enough to know them. He might study more, it's true. He could be a better scholar. . . ."

"Who are we to say?" the Saromsker Rebbe asked. "When he prays, is it recitation?"

"No," said the student. "When he prays, white light bathes the walls. You can see it through the cracks."

"Why did no one tell me this?"

"It just started. He's only fourteen. We wanted to let him calm down before we told you. He's a kind of wild man."

"And you want me to send him to Rabbi Moritz of Breel, a man of ninety-six?"

"Rabbi Moritz will know if he's a *baal shem*."

"Maybe."

"Shall I send for him?"

"How is he at maneuvering through traffic?"

"Nothing can touch him. He could be a snake fighter."

ROGER REVESHZE had run through the halls and up the stairs, his robes and fringes trailing him like battle flags in a strong breeze, and when he presented himself to the Saromsker Rebbe, so excellent was his blood oxygen that he did not breathe hard. Many people can do physical feats and afterward suppress the need to take deep breaths, but Roger, who did not need to suppress an urge he did not have, stood quietly before the rebbe, his eyes semi-skeptical.

Like many fourteen-year-old boys in hasidic costume, he had the sweetness of a lamb and the mischievous air of an owl. At the same time, though possessed of a slight and awkward body that had not yet solidified as it would in time, he seemed to have extraordinary gravity, or perhaps, the Saromsker Rebbe thought, I am just imagining it.

He was not imagining. In Roger's wild eyes, big ears, and big teeth, was a face, framed by blond *peyess*, that led with instant speed to the Pale of Settlement the Saromsker Rebbe had known in his childhood. He merely had to look in the eyes of this boy to see the heart of Eastern Europe, and there, rising against a field of black and gray, came a fume of gold in which, like smoke, souls in transport spiraled upward.

Roger had something about him forever sad but forever indomitable. The rebbe decided to ask a question or two. He allowed them to spring whence he knew not, like an egg coming from the mouth of a magician.

"What is your Hebrew name?"

"Elchanan ben Mosheh ben Arie." "

"What do you see, Elchanan ben Mosheh?"

"You."

"When you close your eyes."

This was for Roger an emotional subject, but one with which he was familiar on a daily basis, so he closed his eyes, raised his arms in a gesture of surprise, for what he saw was different every time, and said, "I see a courtyard in falling snow, people wrapped in blankets and shawls, wood that is broken and steps that are worn, a man standing in a square. He is dressed in black silk robes, his *shtreimel* almost covered with snow, his beard white. My heart cannot convey his expression. And I see houses that are lit weakly but brightly, their windows glowing yellow."

"Do you imagine this?"

"I don't imagine it, it exists."

"Still?"

"Still."

"Do you pray?"

"Of course."

"Who generates the prayers? Do you?"

The boy smiled.

"And what happens when you pray, physically?"

"I twirl."

"You don't *daven*?"

"I begin to *daven*, and then I twirl."

"Like a dancer, spinning?"

Roger shook his head in the negative. "No, head over heels."

"Head over heels," the rebbe repeated, "no gravity."

"I'm blinded," Roger reported matter-of-factly.

"By darkness?"

"By light: white phosphorus, pinwheels, stars on a field of fire. It's an illusion. An ophthalmologist could tell you why. Nerve endings."

The rebbe was not convinced. Vision and skepticism are man and wife, bride and groom. "How do you know it's an illusion?"

"Because."

"Because why?"

"Because I prayed for the life of a bird that had flown against the window and was dying on the sill, and though I was swept up beyond the world, so was he. It's an illusion."

"Maybe it was supposed to die."

"I didn't want it to die."

"Since when is what you want central to the scheme of things?"

The boy nodded in acceptance. These matters would have to be deferred, and the rebbe decided to return to the business at hand. "Roger, please take this letter to Rabbi Moritz of Breel, on Ocean Parkway. Do you know how to get there?"

"Yes, we went there two times."

THE SAROMSKER Rebbe put the forty pages in a manila envelope. Then he opened the top right-hand drawer in his desk and took out a box of matches and a thick candle. He lit the candle. In his left hand he held his seal and in the right the end of a little stick of saffron-colored wax. But, as the wax melted, he burned his fingers, and he withdrew the flame. "I lost my tongs," he said.

"Tongs," Roger repeated, fascinated by the word.

The rebbe went to get a fresh stick of wax from lower down, but he opened the wrong drawer. As soon as he saw what was in this drawer, he slammed it shut. Flushed as red as if he had just climbed a sixty-foot rope, he found the saffron-colored wax elsewhere and nervously started to soften it in the flame.

"What was that?" Roger asked.

"What was what?"

"What was that in the drawer?"

"Wax for sealing envelopes."

"In the other drawer."

"What drawer?"

"The one you opened before you opened the one with the wax."

"Nothing."

"I saw it."

"Saw what?" The rebbe's eyes were now beady.

"The box."

"What box?"

"In the drawer."

"What drawer?"

"What is Lindt?" Roger asked.

"What is Lindt? What is Lindt?" the rebbe repeated.

"Yes, what is it?"

"I don't know," the rebbe said, now looking at Roger with panic.

"Oh."

Roger successfully delivered the Saromsker Rebbe's letter to Rabbi Moritz of Breel, whom he did not see, and who could, therefore, make no judgment as to whether Roger was a *baal shem*. Everything settled down and returned to normal, except for one thing.

WHAT WAS Lindt? Roger's teachers, all *unterrabbis* and *nachmollers*, didn't know, and his classmates didn't know, either. He went to Rabbi Eisvogel, who was second to the Saromsker Rebbe, and his designated successor.

"Rabbi Eisvogel," Roger said, captivated by birds perching on icicles hanging from the eaves of the rabbi's study, "What is Lindt?"

"Lint?" Rabbi Eisvogel asked back. "Lint is cloth shavings or other material, little fibers that collect and combine. Why?"

"No, not that. It was written on the box: L-i-n-d-t."

"What box?"

"I don't know."

"But you saw a box?"

"I don't know."

Rabbi Eisvogel asked, "Did you see a box in a dream?"

"Maybe."

"Are you all right, Roger?"

"I'm all right."

"Good. Lindt, whatever it is, I'll think about it," the rabbi said.

Roger thought that he would never find out what it was. The world was full of mysteries, and he had much else to think about, having been immersed in moral questions day after day, like metal annealed, since he was three years old. He returned to his studies and forgot about what he had seen in the Saromsker Rebbe's drawer. But, then, when the next Sabbath was over, a lighthearted Rabbi Eisvogel, in the presence of students and disciples, asked the Saromsker Rebbe point-blank, "Reb Hayim, tell me, what is Lindt?"

The Saromsker Rebbe's face turned as red as the flag of the Soviet Union. "I don't know," he

said, with a Cheshire Cat smile, "but it may be a kind of Swiss chocolate."

Rabbi Eisvogel said, "Ah, I see. Is it kosher?"

"How would I know?" asked the Cheshire Cat, disappearing into the semidarkness, where, amid chanting and singing weakly illuminated by the light of only a candle or two among the coal-black sateen robes and dark sable hats, a passage had opened to the East, and such questions disappeared in a dim whirlpool that shattered time and revived the life of a hundred generations rising like a bonfire. The black coats, sable hats, and hallucinatory prayer were a stage setting in which light and darkness were intertwined for the coaxing, temptation, and entreaty of countless spirits that, somewhere in the closed and darkened rooms of time, existed still. And though these were as shy and delicate as fawns, they did come, in the mind's eye. And, when they did, they floated before the speechless scholars, not in whitened afterimages but with the strength and color of figures in Renaissance paintings, for it was not death that had been summoned but life, and life came as if the sun had risen and shone through the blackness of night.

ROGER THOUGHT that only he knew the Saromsker Rebbe to be imperfect. Though the Saromsker Rebbe was constantly making protestations of imperfection, Roger now understood that these were only a cover to shield from the eyes of his followers the real imperfection. The Saromsker Rebbe had lied, directly and by omission, and with what the Sage of Minsk, the Koidanyev Gaon, called "dreadful unholy serpentine." Lying was an unsolicited insult to the divine order.

And he ate something that wasn't kosher—not once, not twice, but over time. He concealed sin. He hid evidence. He misled his followers. Although because of the nature and scale of the offense all these things may have been morally forgivable, aesthetically they were not. The balances of the universe are precise and delicate. Depending upon the consequences, lying may be morally condemnable in varying degree, but aesthetically it is impossible in the absolute. One uncourageous lie destroys the core of the imagination. Roger hated lying, and knew that it was the outrider of malevolent forces, which come first with a lie so that they might not have to fight to subdue you. They declare what is true, how to order the elements of truth, and what is false. They ridicule, oppress, and—if you do not bend to them—they kill you.

Roger would never yield to pressure, to false commandments, or to threats, for he had something for which he could gladly die, something that he would proclaim without embarrassment, that was the root, the rock, and the holy place of his life. This was the truth of the death of his mother and father and of so many other people's mothers, fathers, children, wives, husbands, brothers, and sisters, in the holocaust into which he was born and to which he would, until the end of his days, bear witness—even as others might forget, ridicule, dismiss, or demean it.

This was the hook with which the small, slight Roger Reveshze grasped at the robes of God in the hope of holding Him accountable. And though he was told not to, though it was illogical, a presumption—perhaps a blasphemy and a sin—Roger Reveshze knew his position and held fast. For him, this holocaust was a barrel in which the whole universe rolled. He cared little but to look forward to a life that might in a single place touch upon perfection as confirmation that blind persistence and love would lead to eventual reunion.

THERE WAS no great consequence in defying the Saromsker Rebbe: Roger had his compass, and nothing could turn him. But now he could no longer trust the Saromsker Rebbe to sense an impending holocaust, which was part of the rebbe's responsibility as the leader of a community immersed in the study of ancient texts and without the time to read newspapers and journals. Perhaps the rebbe's regular reading of the *New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, and the *Forward* had led him to nonkosher chocolate, but, despite the risk, now Roger had to read them, and to study the politics of nations, as he could no longer trust the Saromsker Rebbe to do so honestly. This required as well occasional listening to the radio. But what radio? And the newspapers, being so thick, were almost impossible to conceal. You could hardly slip them between the pages of a book. Why was so much space given to advertisements for malted milk balls and brassieres—the claims for which obviously were self-serving lies—when a psalm or the Ten Commandments could be written on a diaphanous piece of parchment the size of a postage stamp?

For a boy who was used to four-hour exegeses of a paragraph, a sentence, a line, or even a single word, the prospect of reading every day a newspaper the size of a life jacket was terrifying. Perhaps, to ease his way into such things, and so he would not be faced with the problem of hiding such a big bundle of paper, he would start with the radio. He had heard

radios when he passed by open apartment windows. Once, he had stopped short before an unattended parlor as a Brahms string quartet flowed like an invisible river past curtains lifting in the wind. He had not been allowed to listen to the radio, because nothing on the radio stayed still, and a lie could appear and disappear before anyone could know. A country that listened to the radio would have no way of knowing, therefore, what was true. Roger understood the reason for the prohibition, but now he had his own dispensation. And not only did he have a dispensation, he had a mission.

"Luba," he whispered to one of his classmates, another lamb-and-owl combination, "where is a radio?"

Luba found this entrancing. "You want to listen to the radio?"

"If I could ask a Jew a question, and not have it answered with a question . . .," Roger began.

"You would be the Czar. There's a radio in the butcher shop," Luba said like a Roman conspirator. "Schnaiper can't turn it off."

"He's possessed?"

"The switch is broken. It plays day and night."

"Why doesn't he pull the plug?"

"It's plugged in behind the giant refrigerator where he keeps the liver. If he pulled the plug he would have to move the refrigerator, and if he moved the refrigerator he would have to take out all the liver."

Roger nodded. "It's on all the time?"

"Day and night. The cats listen to it when he leaves the store. And he can't change the station, or he doesn't want to. Roger, he listens to . . . *boogie voogie*."

"The tubes will burn out," Roger said authoritatively.

"No, they won't," Luba answered. "It doesn't have tubes. It has new things called *trahnzeestores*, which never burn out. It will go forever."

"He'll sell the liver."

"Not as fast as he puts new liver in."

"How can that be? Eventually the refrigerator would expand until it was as big as the universe."

"No, sometimes he puts in an onion," Luba said. Luba had been born in a town, recently wiped from the surface of the earth, where logic was not held in the highest esteem when it was held at all.

"How do you know all this?" Roger asked.

"On *erev shabbes* I get the *gribeness* and other chicken stuff from Schnaiper. In the morning the truck gets the meat, but the *gribeness* are never ready then, so in the afternoon Rabbi Eisvogel sends me for them. I carry twenty-five pounds in a wicker basket strapped to my back."

"That's what that is," Roger said, "and that's why it smells that way."

"Yeh," Luba said.

"Can I take your place?"

"For how long?"

Roger thought. "Five years."

Luba's eyes crossed, and he rocked his head from left to right.

"I'll give you all my *hamentashen*."

Luba raised his eyebrows and looked to the side.

"And half my jelly doughnuts," Roger added.

"All of them."

"Three-quarters."

"Okay," said Luba, "but you'll have to wait until May. I have a subdeal with gizzards. I bring them to Rabbi Glipsin of Foin, but in May he's going to Neshville."

"Where's that?"

"I don't know."

SCHNAIPER THE butcher looked up. "Why suddenly a new boy? Where's Luba?"

"He's in training."

"For what?"

"To become a polar rabbi."

Schnaiper narrowed his eyes.

"Canada," Roger said, pointing straight up.

"Completely full of ice."

"So?" asked Schnaiper. "We have winter, too. What would a polar rabbi have to know?"

Roger slowly and intolerantly moved his head, as if to say, "What an idiot," but, then, instead of jumping forward with an explanation, he said nothing, and let the butcher beg for it.

"What? What would a polar rabbi have to know?"

Roger laughed.

"Tell me," Schnaiper commanded.

"You're a butcher, right?" Roger asked. This was a carefully plotted question to ask a man, in a white apron, with a huge knife in his hand, standing at a giant butcher block next to a case filled with ten tons of chicken liver.

"What do you think?"

"So, tell me, Mr. Butcher," said Roger, "walrus."

"What walrus?"

"Walrus. Kosher for Passover, or not?"

Schnaiper's eyes darted. "How am I supposed to know?"

"I'll tell you." Roger beckoned for him to lean forward, and the butcher did. "Ask a polar rabbi. He would know. At this very moment, Luba is deep in studies of precisely this kind of question. Penguins."

"Who's his teacher?"

"Rabbi Eisvogel."

"Eisvogel. Good man. Still wants twenty-five pounds of *gribeness*?"

"Yes."

"It'll be fifteen minutes. I apologize for the radio. I can't turn it off. It's *goyish*, but if you *daven* you can drive it out of your mind. I myself like it. It has pretty music called *boogie voogie*." He went to package the *gribeness*, taking the wicker basket with him like an alpine guide.

Left by himself in the ice-white interior of the butcher shop, Roger lifted his eyes and listened. The radio had been on of course, as it was an eternal radio, when first he had walked in, but it had been just noise. Now he cocked his ears to listen and decipher. He expected to hear, perhaps, an interview with a famous rabbi. No. He thought the next most likely thing would have been an interview with the Pope. No. News about wars, Germany, ships at sea, the President's health. No. Whatever it was, however, it was as slow and deliberative as a talmudic exegesis. In fact, he was pleasantly surprised by the unhurried pace, for he had expected thoughtless gushing, and this was careful, tranquil, with long calming spaces between the words.

"Two on," the voice said. "Two and one . . . Miller at bat. You know, Mel, it's been a long time since we've seen . . . the pitch, low, ball three. It's been a long time since a rookie, like Miller . . . winding up . . . ball four, he walks. Bases loaded."

This desultory conversation, the epitome of a summer afternoon, and one of the most soothing things Roger had ever heard, went on and on. "A three-two pitch to Hollins . . . line drive . . . base hit. The pitch was up and Stanky jumped to get it. So he has a lead single in the bottom . . . in the bottom, of the third. He was zero for four . . . in last night's game. The pitch, swing . . . on the way to Allen. Foul over the Yankee dugout. Allen came to the majors by way of Richmond, Virginia—a good place to play ball. . . . The pitcher winds up. Ball, low on the outside."

In the spaces within the narrative Roger heard a lovely and persistent sound, like the sound of the ocean, and within that sound were others. Sometimes the speaker would get excited and the ocean would roar, and then, uncharacteristically, he would yell numbers and say how great it was, or how dangerous. For fifteen minutes, Roger listened to this, mesmerized, with absolutely no understanding whatsoever of what it was. Then Schnaiper returned, his pluglike body hauling the alpine basket of *gribeness*.

"What is that?" Roger asked, pointing up.

"On the radio?"

Roger nodded.

"That? That's the best part. You could listen all day. I do."

"But what is it?"

"It's baseball," said Schnaiper, "from the House That Ruth Built."

"From the House of Ruth?" Roger asked, stunned.

"Live," Schnaiper said.

"Where is it?"

"The Bronx."

EVIDENTLY, RABBIS kept certain things from their students. Wonderful things. Exciting things. If Schnaiper could be believed—and never had he overweighed a chicken—there was a place in the Bronx that—symbolically? actually? miraculously?—was a direct link to the Israelites. Roger knew that such places could be found in Eretz Yisroel, but never had he heard that they existed in the Bronx. Immediately he wanted to go there, to see. The problem was that he did not understand its language, which seemed as dense and impenetrable as his studies in the Talmud, which, after all, had not come on the instant.

So he inquired of Luba, because Luba had been fetching *gribeness* from the outside world for so long, "Luba, what is the House of Ruth, that's in the Bronx?"

"The House of Ruth?" Luba closed his lamb-like eyes. He had no idea what Roger was talking about, but as a direct descendant of Rabbi Vogelsblume of Hivnis, he didn't have to know. He closed his eyes, spread his arms, and waited for the answer. This was the way of the Jews in countries where for lifetimes they had been forced to the ground, where fact was never better than dreams. Later rationalists, even among the Jews themselves, mocked this, because they had never been so long *in extremis*, and did not understand art, ecstasy, or the parting of seas. They did not understand that, for those who have nothing, dreams are real. Luba began to speak as if possessed: "The House of Ruth . . . is in the Bronx."

"I told you that," Roger protested.

"Did I say you didn't? It's a palace bigger than the temple or the baths of Babylonia. People dance in the aisles, and its four-hundred-foot-high walls are hung with gold and purple draperies. Lit by divine light that showers down from heaven, beautiful women work in a field in the middle, harvesting wheat, like their great-great-great-great-grandmother Ruth. In galleries as high as the Empire State Building, legions of rabbis read the Talmud, and *klezmer* bands in the vast celebration areas play for

dancing as in Simchas Torah. And the food! The food! Vegetables! Roasts! Fat pieces of halvah! Poppyseed cakes! Wine. Every day at sunrise and at sunset the rabbis dance in the wheatfields with the Ruths, like daughters. And, someday, the students will marry the beautiful Ruths, and have babies."

Luba was still vibrating with longing when Roger asked, "How many women work in the wheatfields?"

"A constant supply. As fast as boys are born, so are girls. They come together as the rivers flow. That's the way it is. But there's a catch."

"What's the catch?"

"You can't go there."

"Why not?"

"You just can't."

"So what's the good of it?"

"After you die," Luba said, opening his eyes, "you're taken there on a holy sled."

"Luba, it exists in the world. I heard it."

"But you'll never get there," Luba said, holding his finger up the way Rabbi Eisvogel did when he drove home a point, "unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Or," Luba said.

"Or?"

"Unless you die, or they are in peril and need a champion to save them."

"What kind of peril?"

"Defeat. Such a place is always under siege, but sometimes a champion prays and prays, and then maybe the Holy One, blessed be His name, allows him to champion the House of Ruth. But the champion must have great virtue, for he will carry in his hand the very staff of the Lord."

"How will he know that it is the staff of the Lord?" Roger asked.

"It will be passed to him in the fields, and it will be as if of gold, and it will shine in the light."

UNTIL THE next *erev shabbos*, Roger dreamed of the House of Ruth. He knew in his American mind that what Luba had said could not be and that no such place could exist, just as he knew that people, even the holiest mystics, could not fly. But in his Eastern mind he knew that the ancient rabbis of Breel and Talakreblach actually did fly, even if in earthly terms they did not leave the ground. How was this? To say that they flew, they would have had to have made, in defiance of gravity, a vertical distance between themselves and a point of reference. When Rabbi Vimy of Breel and Rabbi Canopy of Talakreblach concentrated, their point of reference was not the mere earth. They envisioned the limitless universe, in

which they floated as freely as sparkling fish. And was it not true that they did float amid the phosphorus-glistening stars? That the earth came between them and what kept them otherwise afloat was a fact and not a dream, but it was not much of a fact in comparison to the gravity-less infinity in which it existed. The earth was just a speck, less than a speck, and Rabbis Vimy of Breel and Canopy of Talakreblach were, in fact, flying at blinding speed through space, as are we all, but at the time of their visions they were the only ones who both knew it and felt it, which is why they did fly, and which is why Roger could picture the House of Ruth in the Bronx: a place that, even were it not real, God—having hinted to trusting imaginations—would be obligated to make real in one way or another, such as by having Ruth build it.

The rabbis let Roger be—even Rabbi Eisvogel, who was something of a cold bird. When a student suddenly didn't pay attention and fell off in his work, the rabbis looked carefully in his eyes. If his eyes were as eyes usually are, they brought him back around in various ways. But if within the eyes they saw a fire, they left him alone. In fact, they asked him what he required—food in his room, a certain scroll, time to pray, a trip to the ocean, music, a conference with a mystic—and they tried to supply it, to breathe air into the fire for the express purpose of keeping it alight.

Rabbi Eisvogel asked the question, inquiring about what Roger might need.

"I want to go to the butcher's and listen to the radio," Roger said decisively.

"Which butcher?" Rabbi Eisvogel asked.

"Schnaiper. He's the one with a radio."

"Go," Rabbi Eisvogel told him, trustingly. "We'll keep your book open where you left it."

FROM SCHNAIPER'S radio, which had never ceased playing, came the same, languorous, slow, Southern conversation once again. "Do you know what they're saying?" Roger asked Schnaiper, who was very busy.

"What?" Schnaiper asked back.

"This conversation on the radio."

"Baseball," Schnaiper said, cleaving a veal chop. "You know, the game."

"Do you understand it?" Roger asked.

Schnaiper rested his cleaver on the butcher block as if he were a stork resting a broken leg. "Of course I do."

"Tell me how it works."

"The whole game? The rules?"

"Yes."

"It's simple. I've never seen it, but I know from the radio."

Roger nodded.

"First, there's a *peetch-hair*," Schnaiper said, breaking into their exchange of Yiddish with an English word.

"A *peetch-hair*? What's that?"

"I don't know, but without the *peetch-hair* they can't play the game. I heard once how a *peetch-hair* was hit by a flying object of some sort, and they stopped the game until they brought in another *peetch-hair*. From this, don't ask me."

"But what do they do?"

"Well, they run around *besses*, and sometimes they steal the *besses*."

"What are *besses*?"

"Puffy white things they stick in the ground."

Roger was nowhere. "So what's the point?" he asked. "And what are all the numbers for?"

"I don't think the numbers mean anything, really. Anyway, I pay no attention to them. The point is that there are two teams, and the winner is the one that can stay the longest."

"What prevents them from staying?"

"When they miss."

"Miss what?"

"The ball."

"You never said anything about a ball."

"Oh yes, there's a ball. They throw it at each other, and hit it with a stick."

"What for?"

"I don't know. They don't know either: ever since I got the radio, they've been losing."

"Who?"

"The Yen-kiss."

"The Yen-kiss," Roger repeated.

"That's one of the teams. They used to be the greatest team in the world, Mel said. Now they're dying. They won't win this year, even with Mental."

"What's Mental?"

"Mickey Mental," Schnaiper replied, knowingly.

"What's that?"

"A person, the greatest baseball player of our time. But the Dodgers, unless a miracle will happen, are going to kill them."

"Really kill them?"

"You bet."

"What could help them?" Roger asked.

"Nothing. One more game and they're finished. But for next year, if they had a champion, another one like Mickey Mental, but better, well, that would be a different story, maybe."

FROM THE top floors of the building where Roger lived, and through the gaps in ocher and brown buildings and within the steel cage-work of bridges brushed with cool sunshine, the East River was visible in wide segments of blue. From the roof, the blue patches were larger, for one could see over some of the buildings that had blocked them from below. And from the top of the stair shed, yet another story high over the roof, the river was freed. You could see all the way from St. George on Staten Island, along the cliff faces of lower Manhattan and midtown looming rocklike in the day and sparkling like galaxies at night, to the Triborough Bridge. River traffic arrived suddenly on the swift current and departed with equal speed, or fought north as slowly as a man carrying a desk. Sometimes Roger saw a boat gliding out into the harbor at dusk, its stern light bobbing in recession until it became a star. The lovely light making its way into the vastness of the ocean, like the dead in their quiet departures, grew ever fainter.

That fall and winter when it was neither too wet nor too cold, he ascended the incline to reach the small rectangular space at the top of the stair shed, and there he spent many hours in prayer. He recited nothing. He sought nothing. His prayer was the hopeful resurrection, in his heart, of those who were gone. It was the dissolution, in his mind's eye, of all elements, colors, and sound—until, lighter than smoke, they formed a picture as full of glory as the patient astronomical photographs that he had never seen and that, in later years when he would see them, would bring to his face a smile of recognition. All was grace and perfection there, all just and redeemed, all prayer answered, ratios exact, rhythms perfect, laws obeyed.

He had known such things, somehow, since infancy. And he understood that, as he grew, his responsibility was to make sense of them: not to adopt them for his purposes but to take a tiny fraction of the light of perfection for use upon the imperfection of the world, like a match that for an instant brings a little daylight to a dark hallway.

Between the Yenkiss' loss of what Schnaiper called the *Verld* Series to the Dodgers, and the opening of the next baseball season, Roger concentrated upon a single obstruction that he wished to burn through, a single request, a single question. It did not come, and it did not come, and it did not come. The fall's lucid shadows deepened the colors of Brooklyn and Manhattan,

and its cold air enlivened the stars. Winter froze all emotion. Sometimes he would sit in the cold until his heart hardly beat and he was blind, and he would strain, sweeping the darkness in search of a blaze of power, but he would find nothing, he would see no light. Spring came violently and ended in soft air suffused with the scents of flowers and warm brick. Baseball season had started in April. No one was happy. Then came summer, promiscuously scattering great volumes of light, dashing it up streets that had long been in shadow, touching the undersides of bridges as if the sun were boiling in the rivers beneath. Nothing happened, but he refused to give up, and then, on the fourth of June, something did happen.

THAT DAY, as sunburned as a strawberry, Roger came down from his perch for the last time. Upon seeing him, they went to get the Saromsker Rebbe, for Roger had the pellucid eyes of a *tzaddik*, and the Saromsker Rebbe, whose eyes were unclouded with age, was the only one who could properly look into them. He knocked on Roger's door. Inside, the boy was packing a small suitcase.

The Saromsker Rebbe closed the door behind him: there were many people in the hall breathing respectfully.

"I'm leaving for a while," Roger said, "but I'll be back in a few months."

"Where are you going?"

"To the House of Ruth, where a miracle will come, a splinter of light, a flicker."

With everyone following him, the Saromsker Rebbe hurried through the passageways. A thousand people packed into the assembly hall, where dust was dancing in beams of sunlight. The Saromsker Rebbe stood on a high platform. "It could be," he said, "that there is a *baal shem*."

Before the musical instruments were taken from their cases and the locks pulled on the schnapps cabinet, Roger carried his butterscotch-colored suitcase down the brownstone steps and disappeared into streets that had begun to darken and glow red with alien neon. Never had he been to the Bronx, he had no map, and did not know the subway, but he was carried as if on a puff of wind through roaring tunnels and white-tiled stations full of the temptations of kosher hot dogs prepared with nonkosher utensils. While the express idled with open doors in the green curve of the Fourteenth Street station, he listened to a saxophone. The notes for which the player of this instrument was reaching, and would never attain, were the notes Roger had just heard, and even after

the doors closed and the train rumbled uptown, he heard them still.

THAT NIGHT, Roger slept on the roof of the 161st Street IRT station, under faintly visible stars that would have blazed but for the emanations of electric light that make the sky above the City of New York the color of a jonquil. He slept neither on a park bench nor on the pavement, because had some Irish bullies tried to beat him silly and been struck by lightning it would not have been a *mitzvah* for Roger. The air in his resting place was relatively cool and dry, and he was so young and flexible that the washboard indentations in his back vanished ten minutes after he left the corrugated roof.

Soon the sun was high and people were streaming from nowhere to the aquarium-dark spaces under the El to buy puffer-fish-shaped fried things the color of apple pie that were filled with potatoes and cheese, triangular slices of pizza (a new thing) from which the ingredients had tried to slide and been killed during their escape, armies of nonkosher fried chicken parts arranged in golden ranks as in the Napoleonic Wars, and candied apples that you could buy only if you signed a statement stipulating that you wouldn't sue after you ate the paper that stuck to the flat place on the top, had all your fillings pulled out, and were stabbed by the stick. This offered neither the prospect of lunch nor any other meal for a boy whose idea of bliss was herring and dilled potatoes. What did it matter? He wasn't hungry, and he stepped from the shadows of the El into the bright sun, where the House of Ruth loomed as white as chalk, a Pleistocene cliff against which swirled the gray-black exhausts of the Major Deegan Expressway.

Hours before the game, he approached a ticket booth. "Is this the House of Ruth?" he asked.

"This is it."

"This is it, just like that? This is her house?"

"His," the ticket seller said.

"His?" Roger asked.

"His."

"Ruth was a woman," Roger stated.

"Ruth was a Babe, but he wasn't no woman."

"That's not true," Roger said, "but it doesn't matter. I've come to save the Yenkiss."

"From what?"

"Defeat."

"You still need a ticket."

"I shouldn't just go in?"

"You have to buy a ticket even to save the team. But you're in luck. If you buy even a cheap ticket now, you can go to the best seats for the pre-game practice. Mantle is batting this very minute."

"Mickey Mental?"

"Yeah, Mickey Mental."

"He's the one I'm supposed to replace, I think."

"He'll be so disappointed!"

"He can be on the team. I'll just hit for him."

Not having any money was no discouragement for Roger, who pivoted away from the ticket booth, faced the massive concrete walls and iron gates, and, with Moses and Joshua in mind, threw out his arms. His chest was expanded (which wasn't saying much), his fingers spread, and his face upturned in expectation of a miracle, but no breach appeared in the walls. So he repeated the gesture, and said "*Lifto'ach!*" Curiously, no breach appeared this time, either, or any of the dozen times thereafter. Still, Roger had no doubt that he had been commanded upon a divine mission.

Like Joshua, he circled the walls. Unlike Joshua, he came to a truck bay into which vendors were carrying trays of freshly baked pretzels, jelly doughnuts, and other things. Stepping up to an immense Armenian who was carrying sacks of roasted peanuts to a baggage trailer inside, Roger said, "Mickey Mental sent me out here to help you because he wants all these beans inside before it rains."

"What?"

"Mickey Mental. He sent me."

"Mantle?"

"He can't do it. A pain in his back, from playing the violin. Get those beans in right away. You know what Rabbi Belknap of Mazlow says about beans in the rain."

The Armenian looked at the slight, blond, hasidic Jew, and said, "Rabbi Belknap . . ."

"Let's go!" Roger commanded.

In a kind of trance, the peanut czar of Yankee Stadium agreed. "Okay. Let's go! You take these beans from the truck. Go ahead! Take them. Take the beans!"

After working for a half-hour, Roger was in. Not only had he found the House of Ruth, he had breached its walls without slinging a single stone or slaying a single Boabite. Gliding up a ramp in search of June daylight, he came out on the first tier near left field. Looking east toward the bladder neck of the Bronx and into the vast right-field decks rising unto the crane of his neck and topped by rows of flags and formations of lights like the radars on a cruiser, he realized that although it did not fit Luba's description exactly—gone were the purple hangings, the maidens, the grapes—it was close. You could fill it with every rabbi in the world and you would still have room for more.

He looked at rows and rows of seats as neatly folded as laundry, lacquered hard and beerproof. Remembering the oceanic sounds on Schnaiper's radio, he filled in the crowd. In his vision of what he heard, he saw whole steppes of people whose faces were like seeds peering from sunflowers, and whose changes of position and sudden cheers were like wind sweeping high grass. Legions disappeared in the shadows, from which a roar echoed like a hurricane. How many places like this, he thought, would it take to hold six million people, and his answer, quickly calculated, was one-hundred-twenty. Stadiums packed with fifty-thousand people could be placed in a line down both sides of Manhattan from Washington Heights to the Battery, with no space in between, and if the souls within could break their silence, the roar would be unlike anything ever heard.

"One foot at a time," he said to himself, with no idea why he said it. "One foot at a time." He sighed. If only his father and mother could see him, standing in Ruth's house, about to save the Yenkiss. They would not know of either of these things, but if only they could see him.

A young hasidic boy in a black coat and a fur hat on a hot June day had no idea how to save the Yankees, but his moving feet carried him to the rail. At the elliptical center of the field a man in a white suit stood on a barrow of dirt and would periodically throw something at two men who faced him. One of the men was in turtlelike armor, squatting. The other stood, with a weapon.

When the thing that was thrown at the man with the staff would come at him almost faster than the eye could see, he would strike at it, and there would be a crack as in the breaking of a cable, after which the thing that was thrown would fly out into the air, along varying trajectories, and land in the grass. Then someone would throw the man on the dirt a new thing, and the process would continue. Sometimes the man who held the weapon missed, and the thing that was thrown was caught by the turtle, who threw it back. Who knew? But this was baseball.

On the back of the man with the weapon was the number 7. This meant, according to Schnaiper, that he was Mickey Mental. It was a good place to start. If you are going to help the needy, help those in most distress, and those in most distress are those who have fallen furthest. Roger was sure that it was no accident that the only thing between him and Mickey Mental, the greatest baseball player of the age (according to Schnaiper), was a hundred feet of perfectly clear air through which sound could easily carry.

THIS WAS at a time in the morning when the field was most like what a field is supposed to be, swept clocklike by golden legs of sun stiling across it as time progressed, insects busy in flight against the huge foils of black shadow. A white blur that is not mist but a condition of the light, a lost and miscellaneous glare, covered the empty stands and bleachers in which, to Mantle's delight, virtually no one had yet appeared. And those who had come early kept as respectful a distance as pilgrims in St. Peter's who have stumbled upon the Pope in the dry runs of investiture. Fragrant breezes from the field alternated pleasingly with cool downdrafts of leftover night air rolling off the second level like a waterfall. It was the perfect time for the great player to concentrate on the attainment of perfection in hitting the ball. To allow his gifts free rein, he needed something like the flow of a river. In the mornings, when Yankee Stadium reminded him most of the fields his forebears had farmed, that river flowed best. He was deep in concentration, and doing very well, when he became aware of a distraction.

From behind, from the left-field fence out toward third base, came a kind of squeak. At first he thought it was a bird or a cricket. Then he realized that it was an imploring voice. Once every great while, coarse people got into the stadium before a game and stood at the rail calling out his name, hoping for acknowledgment, a conversation, or an autographed baseball. This he had learned to ignore.

But though he tried, he could not ignore the squeak. He screwed up his face, rested the bat against his shoulder, and held up his left hand as a signal to the pitcher to hold off. What was this squeak? He lifted his head, hand still held out, and squinted, which was what he did when he wanted better to hear something behind him. He heard the calling of his own name, after a fashion. "What?" he said, as if asking why the perfect morning had to include this.

Roger had been squeaking as regularly as a tree frog in heat. For ten minutes, without even a hint of self-consciousness—indeed, with miraculous happiness—he had been calling out: "Mickey Mental! Mickey Mental! Mickey Mental!"

Convinced that he was being mocked, the champion turned his head somewhat like an ostrich and stared over his own broad back as if it were a wall. He was expecting to see a large disorganized lout with a face oriented in many directions at once, or possibly a bland-looking idiot with eyes only inches from his hairline. But he saw nothing, because he was looking too high. When he dropped his aim a fraction he spied a small, funny-looking thing in black. Not

budging from the plate, he leaned back slightly on his heels and focused on the object, laboring to understand what it was, while all the time it squeaked at him, shouting, "Mickey Mental! Mickey Mental! Mickey Mental!"

By this time the turtle had stood and removed his carapace. "What is that, Mickey?" he asked. "It's not a monkey, is it?"

"Monkeys don't talk, Yogi."

"Maybe it's mechanical."

"It's making fun of me," Mickey Mantle said. "I've got to take care of this." He strode angrily toward Roger, bat famously in hand, as irritated and as polite as a steambath attendant. Halfway there, he saw that his tormentor was a boy in hasidic dress and a *shtreimel*. The face of this boy was, in fact, oriented in many different directions, but lucidly so, so intelligently in fact that it gave Mantle pause, for in Roger's young eyes was a depth that, even though they were young, Mickey had never seen except in the eyes of the very old. Roger had stopped squeaking, and was smiling, because everything was going according to plan.

A foot taller than Roger, Mickey bent forward, squinted with his left eye, opened the right very wide, and said, "Are you . . . calling me?"

"You're seven," Roger said in his accented English. Mickey nodded.

"What a number! What I could tell you about that number!"

"Is that what you wanted?"

"No."

"Why did you call me that?"

"What?" Roger inquired.

"Mickey Mental."

Roger shrugged. "That's your name."

"What's my name?"

"Mickey Mental. Isn't it?"

"Say *Mantle*," Mickey commanded.

"Mental," Roger said.

"*Mantle*," Mickey repeated.

"Mental," Roger echoed. He could not hear the difference, and wondered at this strange form of introduction.

"Mickey Mental," Mickey said. "Are we done?"

"Oh no," Roger said, "not by a lung shot."

"Not by a lung shot? Look, kid, I've got batting practice. Do you want me to sign a glove or something? I'll do it, but leave me alone."

Roger looked at his hands. "Glove."

"Whadaya want? I'll give you a minute."

Now, like clouds dappling the sea, the thinking moved perceptibly across Roger's eyes. "I've been sent to help you," he said.

HE SPOKE with absolute seriousness, with a gravity of unknown but arresting origin. Mickey forgot the passage of time. Thinking that he was losing his mind, he asked, "Who sent you?"

"*Boruch HaShem*," Roger said, which means, "blessed be the Name."

"*Boruch HaShem*," Mickey Mantle repeated. "Who's that?"

"It's forbidden to say the Name."

"But you just said it."

"No I didn't."

"*Boruch HaShem*, right?"

"*Boruch HaShem*."

"So, you said it."

"I would never say it," Roger said, "*Boruch HaShem*."

"Well, you tell *Boruch HaShem* that I'm not interested."

"I wouldn't say that," Roger said, in a way that indicated a nervous apprehension and his absolute certainty that one dare not do such a thing.

"Okay," said Mickey, "your time is up. That's it." He turned and began to walk back to home plate, hoping that he would hear no more squeaks and that the next time he looked back Roger would be gone and would not appear again.

But he had taken only a few steps when Roger shouted, "God. I can say it in English."

Mickey stopped, turned around, and went back. "God sent you?"

Roger nodded.

"He Himself, personally."

Eyes closed, Roger nodded unambiguously.

"To do what?"

"To lift you from the darkness of defeat."

"And how, did He tell you, are you to do that?"

"I was not told how," Roger said. (The problem for Mickey, as he himself saw it, was that he believed Roger.) "Specific instructions I didn't get, but I was watching, and as usually happens, it came to me."

"Okay," Mickey said, "save me."

"I will," said Roger. "You were repeatedly hitting that object which was thrown at you, with that axe."

Mickey looked at the bat and rolled his eyes.

"And I noticed that you hit the object out to many different places, and that people expressed approval or disappointment depending upon where it landed. Is there an ideal place to which to direct it?"

Mickey laughed to himself a little like a crazy person. "Yeah," he said, "there is an ideal place to which to direct the object."

"Where?" Roger asked.

Mickey took the bat in his left hand, turned his head to the right, and extended his right hand, pointing up and away. "You see that clock over there, above the sign?"

"That says *Longeens*?" Roger asked, pronouncing it with a hard G.

"Longines," Mickey corrected. "The ideal place to which to direct the object is over that clock. No one's ever done it. No one's ever directed a ball out of this stadium."

"I'll show you," Roger said.

"You'll show me."

"Yes, I will."

"Kid, we have the best batting coaches in the world. I'm supposed to be the best batter in the world. How can you show me?"

"Listen," said Roger, losing his patience. "That's what I was sent here to do. Let me show you, and if I can't, I'll go."

Mickey stared at Roger. "What is this?" he asked.

"The goat can butt because he has horns," Roger said, as if that settled it.

And, as if it did, Mickey said, "You wait here. I'm going to see."

"See what?"

"Talk to my friends."

"Okay."

Mickey walked quickly back to home. Roger prayed. *Davening*, he was pulled into the clouds of galaxies and stars, the explosion of suns united and uniting, the greatest glory bleeding perfectly into the smallest thing, the smallest thing assuming effortlessly the greatest glory. It was not that he imagined this or summoned it to appear, but, rather, that his prayer was that the curtain be lifted.

AN AGITATED Mantle took up the batter's position and tapped the plate with the end of the bat. Berra pulled down his mask. Mantle raised the bat and made eye contact with the pitcher. To dispel his confusion, he wanted to hit one into the stands. The pitcher, Martin, wound up, released, and a slow ball came down the chute, precisely in the middle of the strike zone. Mantle swung to smash the ball, and didn't even touch it.

"Stee! Rike!" Berra said.

"Shut up!"

Knowing that his friend didn't talk this way, Berra flipped up his mask. "What's the matter?"

"That kid. He's got me shook up."

"What did he want, an autograph?"

"No. He's come here to save us. God sent him. He says he can show me how to hit a ball over the clock."

Berra thought. "Let him come to the plate. That's what he wants. Let him hit one. Why not? What can you win?"

"You mean, 'What can you lose?'"

"No. 'What can you win?' It means, 'Grab the bell by the broom.' Maybe he can save us."

"How can *he* teach *me*? He's a kid. I don't know, twelve? He's a hayseed," by which the great slugger meant Hasid.

"Mick, maybe he knows."

"I don't think so, Yogi."

"You were a hayseed before you got into baseball," Berra said, expressing the almost universally held impression that Mantle was, somehow, the paradigm of American agriculture.

Mantle looked sharply at the catcher. "I was not."

"Sure you were. Everyone knows it."

"A hayseed?"

"Yeah. Ask any baseball fan in America."

"With the hat, and the sideburns and everything?" Mantle asked.

"That's right," Berra said, thinking of straw hat and rural aspect.

"I was *not*!"

"Yes you were," said Berra, bobbing his head up and down in confirmation. "You've got it written all over you."

Mickey thought this was a dream. "How come no one ever told me?"

"Because it's so obvious."

"It is?"

"Yeah."

"How?"

"In the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you look. Your accent. Your face. It's part of why you're such a hero. I'm Italian. People look at me differently. It's a different attitude."

"Wait a minute," said Mickey, "wait a minute." He turned to the pitcher. "Hey, Billy," he shouted. "Billy. Do I strike you as a hayseed? Do I look and talk like one?"

The pitcher said, "Yeah."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah."

"How come you never told me?"

"Why should I?" the pitcher shouted back. "Who am I, your girlfriend?"

Mickey stared off into space.

"Mick, get the kid," Berra said. "Bring him out onto the field. We'll put the guys in position; it'll be the thrill of his life. Look at 'im. There's no one with him. If you're alone, you're all by yourself."

"Yeah, but he doesn't know anything about baseball. He calls the ball an object and the bat an axe."

He says that he doesn't know how, but that God will provide."

"Get him anyway."

"You believe him?"

"I'll get the guys," Berra announced.

As MICKEY Mantle lifted Roger over the fence, the Yankees loped out onto the field. Maintenance workers looked up. What was this? The whole team, in an empty stadium, set up for a game?

"How much do you weigh?" Mickey asked Roger after he set him down and they were walking—Roger's black costume flowing with the breeze—because the airborne Roger had seemed to Mickey to have had no weight.

"Thirteen and three-quarter *shvoigles*," Roger answered.

"How many pounds is that?"

"I don't know. There are eight *beyngaluchs* in a *shvoigle*."

"Did you ever play baseball?"

"Until a little while ago, I never heard of it."

"Well, here on the field, awaiting your direction, are the New York Yankees."

"You know," said Roger, almost at the plate, "God shifts an untold number of birds twice a year from the top of the earth to the middle, and from the middle back to the top—geese, herons, *fingelehs*, robins, chickens, starlings, woodpeckers, *kibniks*, *svittles*, albatrosses, sprites, doves. . . ."

Mickey awaited what was next.

"If He takes the trouble to shift a goose from the North Pole to Havana, He could easily have set me in proper motion to end up here, and He did. Here are the Yenkiss, all spread out, as He intended, and here am I. Hand me the axe."

Mickey gave him the bat. When it came into his hands, the sun, purely by coincidence, hit it in a peculiar way, and it appeared to glow. Roger held it almost at arm's length, like an upraised sword, and stunned the Yankees as he swayed back and forth and twirled around, for the bat seemed to them—as it seemed to him—to be a staff with a power beyond that of the maker or the wood. That he would dance so, in front of them, as if unaware of their presence, or not caring, they found extraordinary. He was, in fact, momentarily unaware of them, because his thoughts had been seized, and flowed in only one direction, where the staff pointed, up. The only thing in his heart at that moment was love, and the only thing before his eyes a passage from the book of Ruth: "May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead." What the Yankees did not know was that this boy who knew nothing about

baseball had come into their midst to test an ancient compact that of late had been broken. The Yankees did not know that their stadium had been turned into a court of justice in which the prosecutor was an odd little boy and the defendant was the Creator of the universe. In Christian theology—and the Yankees were Christians—this is inconceivable. God does not appear in the dock. He does not dispute with those over whom He holds absolute sway. In Jewish theology, however, He does.

When he finished, Roger looked about and realized that everyone was staring at him in absolute silence, and that now he had to do something big. Praying internally nonstop, he stepped into the position in which he had seen Mantle, and tapped the plate with the bat.

"What do you call the object that is thrown toward you?" he asked of anyone. At a distance, he had not seen that it was a ball.

"Ball," said Berra, leaving out the article, dropping his mask, and crouching into position.

Roger looked at Berra's segmented armor and said, "You must be *trayf*." Then he turned to the pitcher and said, "Throw ball!"

"Hit it above the clock," Mantle said matter-of-factly. After all, they had discussed this already.

Roger nodded, but Wylie, one of the coaches, who was mean and small of soul, mockingly said, "No, first knock off the hand."

"Which one?" Roger asked.

"The minute hand," Wylie answered, delighted. The clock read 10:20.

"Okay," said Roger, choking up naturally on Mickey Mantle's heavy bat.

Martin began to wind up for an easy pitch—he didn't want to hit a small hasidic boy—but Roger stopped him, and turned to Mantle. "Mickey," he said, "when I knock off the minute hand it will fall to the seats below. It's pointed and it must weigh many *shvoigles*. The sign on the left," he said, meaning the sign to the left of the scoreboard, "says '*Anyone interfering with play subject to arrest*.' Does that mean me?"

"No," half a dozen people said in unison. This broke the spell. Now they realized that he wasn't even going to connect with the ball, and they began to think of ways—such as biting their lips—not to laugh at him so as not to devastate his pride, although they knew Wylie would.

"Hey, Mickey," someone said, "after the kid finishes, let him keep the bat."

"Okay," Mickey said. It was a good idea. The kid wouldn't feel so bad.

Roger pointed at the minute hand. This was so much like what Babe Ruth used to do, uncannily

so, that even though they thought he was imitating (which, never having heard of Babe Ruth, he was not), they were troubled. They assumed that the strikeout would take quite a few pitches, with Martin kindly throwing a ball or two, and they shifted from foot to foot.

Martin wound up relaxedly. He was hardly going to throw fast or fancy. He leaned back and threw.

If you had seen it in slow motion, you would have seen a baseball traveling like a planet in orbit, precisely and languorously, though behind its sharpness the rest of the world would have been a blur. Then you would have seen the bat moving back ever so slightly, like the hammercock of a Colt .45. And you would have seen Roger's left foot elevate minutely above the ground. Then you would have seen the bat itself making an arc as certain and as powerful as a comet's, and you would have seen the flow of his muscle and the light in his eyes, and the astronomical powers fed from the billowing fringes and folds of black cloth into the almost-glowing staff. You would have seen, in Roger's face and eyes, a battlefield look, an expression that comes only when impossible outcomes are guaranteed. And then you would have seen the impact—so tremendous that the ball shattered into a hundred thousand minute particles filling the air with a cloud of dust that disappeared on the wind.

The Yankees had never seen anything like it. No one had.

"What happened?" someone asked.

Berra flipped up the mask. "The ball was pulverized. I saw it. I've seen the skin come off a ball, but I never saw a . . ."

"Was that a trick ball?" Coach Wylie yelled to Martin.

"It was the ball that Mickey hit into center," Martin answered.

No one spoke.

"I'm sorry," said Roger. "I guess I hit it too hard. Next time, I'll hit it more gently."

"He hit it too hard," Mickey said to himself, dazed.

The coach got a ball, inspected it, bounced it against the plate, and threw it out to Martin. "Try this one."

Now no one breathed except Roger. The pitch was thrown. The same astronomical conjunctions occurred. The bat connected explosively with the ball but, this time, just under the limit beyond which the ball would have been destroyed. Leather was stretched as far as it would stretch, thread too. It traveled in a straight line, leaving

behind it a brief trail of orange flame and then a hardly perceptible line of white smoke.

Mouths dropped open and bodies froze as the ball slammed into the minute hand of the clock that said *World's Most Honored Watch* and blew it from its axle so that it windmilled through the air, corkscrewing, eventually, into the ground in front of the wall that had written on it the challenging notation, *407 Ft.* The field of Yankee Stadium, with the Yankees standing upon it, was still.

Even Roger stared at the javelin- or propeller-like minute hand stuck perpendicularly in the ground. A seagull dipped down to examine the broken clock, and then, taken by a gust of wind, rose like a rocket and disappeared into the clouds.

"THAT DIDN'T happen," Wylie said. "It was a trick. I've seen it a million times."

"Seen what a million times, Wylie?"

"They put an explosive charge in the clock, and somebody watching with a telescope pushes a button, which sends a radio signal to the detonator, which explodes the hands off the clock. It's the oldest trick in the world."

"And you've seen it?" Mantle asked.

"I saw it in the minors in North Carolina. I saw it in Florida. I saw it all over. You know, they do it."

"I hit the object, truthfully," Roger stated.

"I'll bet you did, kid. Let's see you do it again."

"He can't, the hands down already."

"Now that the charge is gone," said Wylie, "let's see you knock off the other one." He had to believe his own theory.

Roger tapped the bat against the plate. He had a grim, insulted look. "Throw ball," he said to Martin, who was already on the mound.

Before the pitch, Wylie shouted, "Don't go so easy on him this time!"

Martin shot back, "What's the difference? It's how he hits."

"Anybody can hit a slow pitch. That's just giving it to him."

"Throw ball!" yelled a peeved Roger.

"You say, 'play ball,' or, 'pitch it in,'" Mantle told him.

"Pitch it in!" Roger shouted.

Martin wound up, and the ball came in toward the plate fast but straight.

Now that the motions were familiar, Roger was unconcerned about missing, and looked forward to the sharp crack of the bat. He worried only about hitting the ball gently enough not to pulverize it. Once again, he connected. Once again, the ball smoked toward the clock and struck it, this time

breaking the hour hand off at the base. It fell, bumped against the scoreboard, and landed flat on the bleachers.

The Yankees were awed, but wanted reassurance nonetheless. Knowing that there was no wind, and that the field was dead silent, Mantle almost whispered, "Kid, can you put a hole in the clock?"

"Sure," said Roger. "Where?"

"At the two o'clock position."

"Pitch it in!"

The ball came in, and left like an artillery shell. A crunch sounded shortly after a hole appeared near the two.

"Get Stengel," Mantle commanded, his voice almost shaking (Mickey Mantle's voice never shook, at least not in Yankee Stadium). "I think the kid's just about to hit the ball out of the park."

In no time at all, Stengel emerged from the dugout. He had already been on his way, having been told by a choking assistant manager that Babe Ruth was back, reincarnated as a kid who was fresh and could do things the Babe had never done. Stengel believed this to be an elaborate joke, and he didn't have time for jokes. "What's going on here?" he asked belligerently. "Why're you guys on the field? It's not enough that Kansas City is going to completely run over you, you want to be tired, too?"

Mantle shook his head. "Casey, this kid is going to hit the ball out of the stadium," he said, and then laughed like a deranged person. "Really, he is!"

Stengel focused on Roger for the first time. He tried to speak, but the sight of Roger, so small and slight, in a black hasidic cloak, a *shtreimel*, and *peyess*, made him unable to. Then he said, "All right. You got me. Now let's get back to work, okay?"

"I'm serious," said Mantle, a little angry and a bit trembly.

"Have you been drinking, Mickey?"

"He destroyed the clock," a Yankee said. "He did. Look."

Stengel looked up at the blasted clock. "Who did that?" he asked.

"He did," Mantle said.

"It's a trick," Wylie shouted. "I saw it in the minors."

"Okay, jerks," Stengel said, never known for being unimpulsive. He paraded back and forth for a moment or two, thinking. "If that kid can hit a ball out of this park . . . gimme a break, will ya . . . if he can do that, and he's gotta do it more than once" (the businessman in Stengel could be cautious, too), "I'll sign him for a million dollars a year and I'll double your salaries, every single one of you."

The Yankees were ecstatic with the prospect.

"But," Stengel went on, "if he can't—in fifty pitches—I won't sign him for anything, and I'll cut your salaries in half for a year." Stengel loved this. Unlike his current season, it was win-win.

"All of us, Mr. Stengel?" asked an outfielder who had just risen from the farm team and had a baby to feed.

Now Stengel nearly glowed. "No, you've got a choice here. Everyone who thinks the kid can hit it out, get behind the third-base line. Everyone who doesn't, get behind the first-base line. If you're behind the first-base line, your salary stays the same, no matter what. If you're behind the third-base line, it's double or half. Ha!" He was sure that not one member of the team would walk north beyond the third-base line. He had brilliantly transformed their joke on him into a joke on them.

FOR THE next few minutes, the Yankees were deep in thought, and no one moved. Then Berra stood up and, with his left hand, removed his mask in the practiced gesture that he had accomplished many thousands of times. Stengel thought he was giving in. But Berra took a breath, pulled the mask back to his right shoulder, and hurled it like a pie plate beyond the third-base line. "That stands for me!" he shouted, and squatted down, confident that he would not have to catch the next pitch.

Mantle smiled the smile of someone who, though he may be about to lose grievously, will feel a deep satisfaction even in loss—as if the things that people do, all the hundreds of millions of different things, were measured not merely in the visible and apparent accounts of the world, but in another ledger of far greater import. He crossed the third-base line, and waited. Just standing there made him feel like his ancestors who had crossed oceans, knocked down forests, and fought wars.

Then the others followed suit, until only Stengel, the new outfielder, and Wylie were left behind the first-base line. Stengel was irritated beyond measure, but delighted as well. "Wylie, you don't even count. You're not a player, get away from me." He looked at his team. "Okay, nuts, you want to mutiny? Okay. You're outa your minds. But, look, I like it! You know why I like it? I like it because it's justice. You're doing so badly, you deserve a cut in pay. That's why."

He turned to Martin, still on the mound. "What about you?"

"I'm with them," Martin said, pointing to the team.

"And so am I, goddammit!" yelled the new outfielder, crossing over.

"You mustn't say that," Roger scolded as the outfielder ran by him.

"Let's go, then," Stengel said. And then, to Roger, "Did they put you up to this, kid? Did they pay you?"

"No one ever paid me anything," said Roger, "in my whole life."

After assessing Roger, Stengel turned to Martin. "Billy, don't hurt him. Gentle pitches, nice and easy, all of them."

"You haven't seen him," Martin said.

"But I have seen him. He's standing right there. Look at him. Can you believe it? Kid, if you can hit the ball out of the stadium once in fifty pitches, you can have as many more pitches as you need to hit it out again, and then I'll sign you as a Yankee for a million dollars a year."

"It has nothing to do with money," Roger said, and tapped the plate with the bat. "It can't have anything to do with money. I don't want the money. I just want to teach you," he said earnestly, "to hit these objects, these . . . balls, with perfection."

Because there was no other sound except the dim roar of traffic on the Major Deegan, even the slight luffing of the flags in the June sky was audible. The Yankees knew that what they expected was not possible, but they believed that they were going to see it.

"What lies behind the wall, past the tall white building?" Roger asked.

"The Bronx," Berra answered.

"And what lies beyond the Bronx?"

"Long Island Sound."

"Are there many boats in Long Island Sound?"

"On a day like today," said Berra, "there are."

"Beyond Long Island Sound, then?"

"Long Island."

"Of course," said Roger, unhappily. "And then the ocean."

"Then the ocean," Berra confirmed, "like water off a duck's back. Why?"

"I wouldn't want to hit anybody," said Roger. "Play ball."

As Martin wound up, Stengel was filled with joy, because, if Roger could do this, doubling salaries would be nothing compared to the revenue that would pour in. To see a ball hit out of Yankee Stadium, people would come from Borneo. If Roger couldn't do it, the pay cut would free up funds for hiring some new players with blood in their veins. But, most of all, Stengel, like his team, like everyone, loved being at the threshold of great events.

The ball flew in, expressly. Roger now had the look of a professional, the Mantle look, the forward-oriented, concentrated gaze, the ease, the love of action. It was the attitude of the kind of racehorse that lived above all to run. *Shtreimel* tilted, he stepped forward and leaned gracefully into the pitch. The bat connected with the ball, this time with a sharp up-angle that every experienced batter and all the coaches deemed impossible for propelling the ball over the wall. It was simply too steep. Even had Ruth hit a ball so steeply it would have flown gloriously high but not even reached the bleachers.

This ball, however, left a faintly white trace and seemed to accelerate as it climbed. Everyone except Roger shielded his eyes and followed the trajectory. The ball made no parabola, but kept going up. They waited for it to lose power and head down, plopping into right field, but it didn't. Only when it disappeared from sight did they realize that it was not going to come down in the stadium. They didn't know where it was going to come down. It was gone.

It had never happened before, and no one knew what to do. So Stengel dropped to his knees and said "Holy cow," more softly than people usually say holy cow, and he kept repeating it, as if he were in conversation with himself, a conversation limited to those two words spoken with different emphasis and intonation. It went something like this: "Holy cow. Ho-ly cow. Ho-ly cow! Holy cow? Holy . . . cow! Ho-ly . . . ca-ow! Holy? Cow?" and so on, quietly, madly.

The Yankees gave no thought to their new wealth, for as Roger hit four more pitches, one after the other, into the distant Atlantic, and Casey Stengel made an opera out of just two words, they could think only of how lucky they were to be there at that very moment.

ROGER TURNED to Stengel and said, "You see?"

"I see," said Stengel. "I see."

"I have a suggestion," Roger went on.

"Sure, we'll do it."

"I was watching Mickey hit the balls here and there."

"Yes," Stengel said. (Not "Yes?" but "Yes.")

"Three people wait out in the grass to catch them."

Stengel nodded as if seeing the game through new eyes. "That's right. They do."

"They shouldn't. The one in the middle should stay, but the others should come closer in."

"Who would cover left and right field?" Mantle asked.

Roger pointed to both, and said, "The one in the center can go to either."

"Uh," said Stengel, most timidly, "we've found that, given the depth of the field, the most a man can cover is a third. You see, the most he'd have to run would be a sixth, which would then give him a chance to cover the field back to front." Stengel paused. "You have another way?"

"Yeh," said Roger. "Cover from the center. I'll show you. Give me one of those *kreplach*," by which he meant a fielder's mitt. (They wouldn't have known had he not held out his left hand and slapped it with his right fist, as he had seen Larsen do with his glove.)

"Get the kid a *kreplach*!" Stengel barked, and Mickey Mantle—Mickey Mantle—ran to the dugout as eagerly as a batboy, and emerged with his own glove to give to Roger.

Roger jogged to center field. He didn't go particularly fast, but he seemed to rise as high with each step as if he were wearing kangaroo shoes. Mantle took the bat that had just made history and positioned himself to hit pop-ups.

"Hit one right to him. See if he can catch it," Stengel commanded.

"What?" Mantle asked. "He just hit a ball out of the park, five times in a row, Casey. You think he can't do what he says he's going to do?"

"He's probably never caught a ball," Stengel insisted.

"So what," Berra said. "The start of the middle is the end of the road for the beginning."

"That may be so, Yogi," Stengel said, "but let's make sure to start where he is."

"I'll do that if you want," Mantle agreed, and hit one toward Roger. Mantle was so good that Roger didn't even have to shift his feet to position himself for the catch, which he accomplished swimmingly.

They weren't expecting what happened when Roger threw the ball in. Never having thrown a baseball, or even held one, he overthrew. The ball sailed into the back of the upper grandstand. "This has gotta be a dream," Stengel said.

"It isn't," said Berra. "You know how, when you're dreaming, there's a sign that says, '*You're Dreaming*'? There's no sign."

"Yeah," said Stengel. "You're right. There's no sign, so we know we're not dreaming. Okay, Mickey, let's see if he can do this. Hit him one as far back on the third-base line as you can."

"I have a feeling he can do it," Mantle said, hitting with newfound strength.

The ball went deep into left field, and Roger followed—no, preceded—it with inexplicable speed.

His run had nothing about it of gravity. He just burned across the grass, like a fast train, and waited for the ball to come in. This was astounding, but not impossible.

Stengel continued to direct. "I want to see this. He's standing on the third-base line. Hit one right along the first-base line. If he can cross the field . . . if he . . ."

The ball went high into right. Roger kept his eye on it as he ran. He ran so fast that one of the players said, "Look at that! Look at that!" and Roger arrived in right field in time to catch the ball.

They motioned for him to come in, and as Roger glided toward them along the first-base line, this time carrying the ball with him, Stengel turned to the team and said, "This is a whole new situation."

BECAUSE OF the many complications that ensued, Stengel knew it wasn't a dream. Dreams are notable not for their complications but for their lack of them, which is not to say that they aren't complicated. Precisely because it wasn't a dream, everyone who had seen what had happened had to be bribed, threatened, begged, or cajoled into silence. This meant the Yankees themselves, including a few coaches and assistant managers, four groundskeepers, and a hot-dog-roll contractor who witnessed the remarkable events while wheeling in several thousand pounds of rolls. Stengel (who, as Berra said, was the smartest jerk who ever lived) enlisted those in the conspiracy not only with huge amounts of money but with roles to play. The hot-dog-roll man was retained at \$5,000 per week to provide covert transportation for Roger in a hot-dog-roll truck. The groundskeepers were promised, if they kept mum, new lawns and new houses. The Yankees themselves had everything to win.

The problem of secrecy wasn't overwhelming. The real trouble was that Roger would have to quit a week before Rosh HaShana, which meant he couldn't play in the World Series. This was unbearable, and as the Yankees played—brilliantly, if losingly—against Kansas City that same afternoon, the conversation in Stengel's office went as follows.

"You've got to play in the Series, Roger. You can have anything you want. What do you want? Money? Broads? A car? A trip to Israel?"

"I want the Yenkiss to win."

"So do I, Roger. That's why you've got to play in the Series."

"I can't."

"Roger, this is important here, really important. Who exactly says that you can't play in the Series?"

"God."

"I understand. You want to be a good guy. You want to be devout. You want to follow the rules. But God wouldn't mind if you played in the Series. I'm sure many famous rabbis would uphold my statement."

"He would mind, He told me."

"What passage says that? We'll get the best rabbis to look at it."

"There's no passage. He told me."

"He told you directly?"

"Yeh."

"I mean He actually . . . He . . . told you Himself? You spoke to Him?"

"I always speak to Him. But this time He came down to the roof."

"Symbolically."

"No."

"No?"

"Mr. Stengel"—which Roger pronounced "Stengeleh"—"I weigh thirteen and three-quarter *shvoigles*. I'm two *yumps* tall. How do you think I hit the ball out of the house? Do you think I could do such a thing alone? Who do you think is in charge here? You? Me?"

NOT ONLY would Roger have to quit a week before Rosh HaShana, but because of study requirements and holidays he could play only in five games. Also, he had to have kosher food, and a place to live. Even had Roger been willing to accept money (Stengel foolishly told Mantle that the Yankees would have signed Roger for \$10,000,000 a year—contingent on performance), the Yankees would have put him up in the presidential suite at the Carlyle anyway. As they didn't even have to pay him, this was almost effortless. No one in the world, Stengel reasoned, would ever make the connection between Roger Reeves, the new rookie fresh out of the Carolinas or possibly Georgia (who knew?), and Winston Wilgis, a neurotic and reclusive rubber heir whose aides paid the hotel staff large amounts of cash to be discreet, and who was never seen and never left his room, although his adopted son, a hasidic teenager who sometimes wore a baseball uniform, came and went regularly in a hot-dog-roll truck that pulled up to the loading dock.

Roger had bodyguards—two huge couches in bulging suits and bowl-like haircuts, whose enormous Magnum revolvers were like giant swellings under their coats. They stood in front of his door whenever he was there, and checked the rabbis who brought carts of kosher pancakes and chocolate milkshakes for milk meals, and Bessarabian shish kebab and chopped-liver sandwiches for

meat meals. They shook the Cel-Ray celery- tonic bottles to make sure they were not bombs (which, when Roger opened them, they were), and kept all maids and waiters in total ignorance of the occupant of the hotel's best accommodations. Roger was rather alone.

The first night he was brought to the hotel, after ten hours of unwritten contract negotiations in which he was totally inflexible and got exactly what he wanted, he was tired. At his insistence they had stopped at a delicatessen at 100th Street and Broadway, where he ate like a cow and drank six bottles of Cel-Ray, his favorite drink in the world, that he had had only once before in his life, during a raucous and disorganized Simchas Torah when he had mistakenly grazed at the rabbis' sweet table.

They popped him into the hotel room as if he had been in a hotel before, which he hadn't, and there he was, in the presidential suite of the Carlyle, on the day that he had hit five balls out of Yankee Stadium, but luxury meant nothing to him, and this kind of glory little.

The furniture was so European that Louis XIV might not have noticed had he by some miracle been transported to the Carlyle from his own time and place. The carpets were soft and dense, the walls smooth and solid, everything clean and well lit, the colors bleeding into one another like wounded comrades in the French foreign legion. Roger wandered from room to room, but only in the living room did he fully realize what was happening, for there, as high above the earth as an airplane, huge banks of whistle-clean windows opened out on Manhattan, which roared and glowed, fading into the distance in never-ending avenues of a million flares, draped with necklaces of bridge lights, and banked high with massive buildings twinkling like starshine on a lake.

Someone else standing in the same place, a president perhaps, a tycoon, a movie star, or even a baseball player, might have felt a feeling of power and vindication. To be high and to see the world marked out below you in cool fire is, after all, the dream of angels, but Roger felt neither pride nor vindication. Instead, his heart swelled at the great expanse of lights and a blood-red pennant left in the sky by the setting sun. He had no thought of what he had accomplished or where he had come. Looking over the miraculous work that stood before him he saw no reflection or reminder of himself, but only the kind of high glory that rides from place to place and time to time on a shower of sparks.

JUNE WAS hot, perfect, and strange. It started magnificently and was slowly transformed into the initial bakery days of summer, tolerable for their novelty, when the beaches are as hot and white as molten glass but the ocean is blue and numbingly cold. A day of prairie heat would surrender to a northern European evening with cool breezes veering off the Hudson and sailing down the avenues like Dutch sloops. Morning fogs as thick as cotton could burn off in a minute, leaving behind them a newly shining world. It was a gorgeous month, but its brilliances were a foil for many peculiar things.

For example, a Mr. Winston Wilgis, rubber heir and recluse, called the Hotel Carlyle front desk to ask for a complete set of the Babylonian Talmud and sixteen cases of Dr. Brown's Cel-Ray Tonic on ice. The next day, he asked for deep-sea fishing equipment, and if you had been walking on the street below his suite and had had occasion to look up, you would have seen, at various times, tarpon lures, bagels, socks, and a banana flying with dampened grace ten feet above you, a pendulum suspended by semi-invisible line.

As much as he caused others puzzlement, Roger himself was puzzled. Worked with great skill into a fruitwood enclosure in the living room of his suite were two televisions and a high-fidelity radio. One television played in black and white, the other in experimental color. Neglecting these wonders on his first night, Roger awoke early the next morning and turned the knobs. He had never seen a television. At first, nothing happened, but then a white dot appeared in the center of the pudding-gray glass, soon to move and intensify like a supernova, and then, like the opening of an umbrella, to expand into what became a picture accompanied by a hardly bearable tone. The picture was of something that looked like a spiderweb, and had written in the corner, WPIX-TV, Channel 11. Utterly useless. The one in color was not much better, though it looked like a Herschel Trixie, the only abstract artist Roger had thought he had heard of, though he had actually not heard of any.

The radio played more than just one station, and because no liver-filled refrigerator case interfered, you could turn it on or off whenever you wanted. The quality of its sound far exceeded that of the butcher's radio, and the first time Roger turned it on the most extraordinary music filled the room, music such as he had never heard. He listened in wonderment as someone sang a lyric that sounded like, *A wop bopa loobop a pop pop pop, a hop poppa loopa, a wop bop pop*, and so on, with a pace and excitement that, though entirely foreign, seized him and made him

dance around the room in abandon. Not even a Memphis lounge lizard could have done a better number, or swiveled his hips, bit his lips, and raised his cheeks until his eyes were slits, than did Roger, who, when the song ended and was replaced by a jingle that went, *Brusha brusha brusha, new Ipana toothpaste, healthy for your tee-eeth!*, stopped dead in delight.

ROGER WAS not the only one that June to be astonished as both the sports and rabbinical worlds were thrown off balance by inexplicable changes to the New York Yankees. The only plausible explanation, that the Yankees wanted to draw new fans from the perhaps-underrepresented Orthodox Jewish community, was fairly unsatisfactory in that it did not actually explain the extraordinary measures. First came the announcement that all hot dogs sold at the stadium would be kosher. They were mainly kosher anyway. Then the revelation that on "ice-cream days" (a new term in baseball), hot dogs would not be served, and vice-versa. This caused quite a stir.

At the press conference called to announce the food plans a reporter asked Stengel if and when peanuts would be available. "I'm told that peanuts are parve, and will be available at all times," he answered. Most of the reporters thought that "parve" was a Stengel word (perhaps picked up from Berra, who was always inventing new ways to say things) that was the equivalent of the beatnik "cool," or the now dated "swell." This quickly infiltrated the sports press, and announcers began to talk about "the really parve double-header," in Baltimore, or Y.A. Tittle's "parve new contract."

The nation became aware that now before every game in Yankee Stadium the stands echoed with Hebrew prayers, and that hasidic rabbis stood behind the umpires at each of their positions. Disputes that had once taken seconds or minutes now sometimes took hours, with boys in black running to and fro to fetch or return leather-covered tomes for support. Stengel began to pronounce his own name with an "eh" at the end, and no longer referred to his team as the Yankees but as the Yenkiss, with the last syllable pronounced as in the last syllables of "hocus pocus."

Speculation was that all of this was an inexplicable commercial strategy of the management, and as long as people credited the theory the inexplicable seemed explicable. Even when the team refused to play on Saturdays, everyone thought it was simply a disastrously stupid move somehow designed to increase attendance. But the changes were not solely the work of management. Some of the players now wore what

everyone in New York called *yamak*s, a strangely Japanese way of referring to what Roger called *kippe*s, or, in the singular, a *kippe*. When the press finally got up enough nerve to ask Eustis Jackson Jr., the second baseman, why he was wearing such a thing, he said, with some heat, "I'm a colored man, this is a free country, and I can do what I want."

When Berra was asked, he responded with a long and phenomenally disjointed essay about freedom of speech, the free-enterprise system, and his ancestors. What did that have to do with his wearing of a *yamaka*? With a twinkle in his eyes that the press never saw, he said, "They would, had they could, because the least obvious reward for labor is hard work." But that was not the end of the encounter.

"Hey, Yogi," a reporter said. "What are those threads, those, uh, fringes, sticking out of your pants?"

Yogi tucked them in, saying, "Frayed threads. It happens when it's washed a lot."

"Yogi," they asked. "What is all this stuff, suddenly?"

"What stuff?"

"All this Jewish stuff."

"What Jewish stuff?"

"You know, kosher stadium food, Hebrew prayers, rabbis behind the umps, *yamak*s, fringes. What's going on?"

"Jewish stuff?" Yogi asked. "As Eustis said, it's a free country, right? Look, guys, when you have a choice, there's only one way to go."

They accepted this, and went on. "But closing on Saturday is nuts. Aren't you worried about attendance?"

Berra laughed. "Just be there for the game against Kansas City."

THE REMATCH against Kansas City was also a home game, as the A's played solely away games that June because their field had been invaded by locusts. In New York at the end of the month it was hot and nearly everyone was either at work or at the beach. That the stands were half-full might have been worrisome to management as a sign that the Yankees had lost their touch, but they were worried only about Roger.

Roger was fine, had kept up his extraordinary record in numerous practices (although, to keep the strategy secret, he hit balls out of the stadium only in the dark), and assured them that the presence of a crowd and the press would have no effect on what he could do. But they had seen too many confident rookies turn to swamp mush at the roar of the crowd to be reassured, and they breathed apprehensively all

through June, especially Stengeleh, who thought that perhaps he was having an epic dream.

Just striving to imitate Roger had made the Yankees hit better, run faster, and throw harder. They were losing by lesser margins, and although no one expected them to get to the Series, there was hope that they might hold their own enough to come back the next year. In fact, the sportswriters hoped for the agonizing comeback that would give them a great theme for the rest of the season. In the bottom of the ninth inning in the Thursday game against the A's, the score was Kansas City 3, New York 0, which wasn't so bad, and might be good for stimulating eight-hundred words of drivel about a Yankee revival. The radio announcers, however, were used to filling dead air in any circumstance, albeit with a languor that would have been the envy of Oblomov. No matter what, they would broadcast their perfectly timed descriptions in wonderful baseball-afternoon bursts.

Thus, Red and Mel—Red from Alabama, and Mel from Alabama, Red thin and Mel stocky, Red red-haired and Mel blue-black, Red high-strung and aristocratic and Mel what you might call a garage guy, Red a prima donna and Mel a prima donna, and both as comfortable to American ears as the sound of the lines whipping against a flag-pole on a windy day. Red was looking forward to catching the train up to Briarcliff, and Mel was going to dinner that night with a broad. They thought the game was more or less over. So, apparently, did a lot of other people, who were headed to the subway and the parking lots. The voices of the announcers, arrowing over the air, conveyed a yearning for scotch on the 5:06 as the sun beat off the brackish Hudson, and the anticipation of the relaxed clink of glasses and ice at "21."

After some light opera in service of Rheingold Beer, Mel summarized: "Yankees versus the A's, Yankee Stadium, bottom of the ninth." The word ninth had an upward intonation, like a rising pheasant. "A's three, Yankees nothing, Koswick on third, Miller on second, two outs."

"Folks," said Red, "there are two outs, and Mantle is up. Or will be . . . in a second. What do you say, Mel?"

"It's pretty clear, Red. Mantle has to go for a homer, and Zelinka has gotta walk him."

"And strike the next batter out. . . . There's potential drama here, Mel. Mantle has been hitting well."

"You're right, Red. If he hits now the way he's been hitting in practice, the Yanks may have a chance today."

"I know what you're gonna say is strange, Mel," Red interrupted.

"You've seen it, too?"

"I have. He'll hit one into the bleachers, and you'll see a pained expression on his face, as if that's just not good enough."

"That's what makes a champion, Red. Never satisfied."

"Okay, Mantle is up. Zelinka can't take the chance. He's gotta walk him."

"There's Mick. He brushes the dust off his left leg. A few practice swings."

"He looks intent. He's gotta hit for the bleachers. Look, people have stopped leaving the stadium. They're poised at the ramps, their feet toward the exits, their bodies twisted so they can look over their shoulders at the field."

"I'll tell you, Mel, I would not walk out of this ballpark if Mickey Mantle was up at bat, or, if I did, I'd stop just like these folks."

"The pitch," said Mel. "Ball one. So far on the outside that maybe it was for the Dodgers."

Red added, "Some people are booing Zelinka."

"Zelinka doesn't care. The game could ride on this. He can't let Mantle drive in three runs and go to dangerous extra innings."

"Zelinka hasn't fared well against Mantle in the past. He knows. . . . He winds up. . . . the pitch."

The pitch was a slow boat to the outside, so far to the outside that it had to be slow to give the catcher time to get to it. But that was not something to be taken for granted, as the pitcher and the catcher had. Most uncharacteristically, Mantle ran after the ball.

"He's running!" the announcers shouted. "He bunts! Oh boy! He's halfway to first already, and there's no one there to pick up the ball!"

Koswick, the runner on third, started toward home but the third-base coach called him back. "I coulda made it!" Koswick said. The coach just looked away, as did the rabbi behind him. Meanwhile, the catcher went for the ball and found himself in the middle of the infield while Zelinka rushed in to cover the plate. The catcher frantically threw the ball to Zelinka, who almost didn't catch it, and, when he did, stood on the plate in a state of shock, looking out at bases loaded and knowing that his options were getting fairly narrow. As he returned to the mound, the fans at the exits went back to their seats.

The radio announcers forgot what they had been thinking of, because here was what they lived for. Bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, three nothing, two outs. Of course they and everyone else hoped the next batter up would go to a three-two

count, the ultimate precipice of baseball, but even without that, what they had was good enough. A home run would win the game, a triple would tie it, a double would put the Yankees one down, a single or a walk two down. They were still alive, and no one knew what would happen.

"Morgan is up next, Red. With his batting average . . ."

"The only question, Mel, is who will be the pinch hitter."

There was a delay, during which an argument in the Yankee dugout was overshadowed by the inevitable Kansas City conference with Zelinka, which was very animated.

The announcers commented on the pressure, and set the scene for their audience across the nation. "It's been a really hot day in New York. The first subways, windows open, are rolling past, taking home those lucky enough to have gotten off work early. A shadow has just begun to move across the field, and although it's an ice-cream day in the stadium, you can smell hot dogs and hamburgers cooking in the restaurants beyond the fence. The question remains, ladies and gentlemen, who will hit for Morgan? Mantle's not moving from first. It was a strange thing to see him bunt."

Then, over the radio, in every town and minuscule junction in America, from Caribou to the Everglades, Norfolk to San Francisco, came the following question: "Reeves? Who's Reeves?"

THE SOUND of paper being shuffled was heard across the nation as Red and Mel pulled out the back pages of the roster.

"Roger Reeves," said Mel. "A rookie out of Georgia. His first day in the majors. This is unbelievable, Red."

"It sure is, Mel. I've never seen it. . . . in all my life. Reeves has never played before a crowd this large, never faced a pitcher like Zelinka. The Yankees . . . well, something's come over the Yankees."

Mel had been reading. "He's only eighteen years old," he said, astonished. "He played for half a season. On a team called the Milledgeville Crab Legs. That has since been disbanded."

Red hushed down into his portentous voice. "All I can say, Mel, is that I'll bet this boy is seven feet tall and weights two-hundred-fifty pounds."

"Southern boys are short, Red."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean they're short and light. Look at you."

"A lotta colored boys are Southern boys, and they're big, Mel."

"Yeah, Red, but this is a white boy."

"How do you know?"

"Because there he is."

Roger walked onto the field, with the crowd primed for the most generous cheer of their lives, but the cheer was drowned in shock.

He was not even five-and-a-half feet tall, he was so gangly that it seemed he could not have weighed much more than a hundred pounds, and his quaquaversal gait and quaquaversal eyes made him look like someone who might indeed have been on a team called the Milledgeville Crab Legs. As a physical specimen, he was easier to associate with a hospital than a major-league baseball team. Even from far away you could see how thick his glasses were, how white and delicate his hands. The baseball cap capped his head like a mixing bowl, but did not stem the wild flow of *peyess*.

"You know he's from the South," Mel said, "because he's got those Johnny Reb sideburns. But he's so small. Why is that, Red? Why are people in the South so small?"

"They aren't."

"Yes they are. What is it, nutrition? The Civil War?"

"They aren't."

"Yes they are. Look at Reeves."

"I think Reeves will acquit himself well," Red offered, "no matter what the impression you have of him." As far away as the docks of Galveston, they could tell over the radio that Red would have killed Mel but for the fact that a baseball game intervened. It was strange, in that both were from Alabama.

Roger took his position and raised his head to look at the huge stadium, now completely silent and still, with tens of thousands of people looking back at him. He looked left, and there was Zelinka, three times his size, smiling with contempt. Even the rather large Orthodox contingent in the right-field stands was quiet. They knew in their bones that Roger Reeves of the Milledgeville Crab Legs was one of them, and their overwhelming emotion was fear that he would be the reason for the defeat of this otherwise invincible Gentile team (they were somewhat behind the times), and that this might result in a pogrom.

ZELINKA DECIDED to drive a fastball right down the middle, square in the center of the batting picture. He had done this many a time before to rookies, who always had swung after the ball was in the catcher's mitt. When pitched without complication, his fastball was so fast that no inexperienced player would ever be able to connect with it. And given Reeves's size and weight, even if he did it was possible that the force of the ball would push

the bat back rather than vice-versa. In the few cases of this that Zelinka had seen, the batter was shocked to find himself, absent his own volition, back in the ready position. The only drawback was that such balls veered up or down, and sometimes bounced off the catcher and rolled into play without anyone realizing that the batter hadn't hit them. It didn't matter. Zelinka wanted to make every pitch to Reeves a recoilless rifle shot. He was enraged that they would put such a batter up against him, and wanted to make the ball smoke on its way in.

The stadium was like an ocean of angry rabbis. The whole world at that moment seemed to depend on Roger, and he had no confidence that he could hit a baseball, much less one thrown by an enraged major-league pitcher, much less send it out of the stadium and thus make in the world of baseball an explosion like that of a hydrogen bomb. Roger could not even see the ball. He had no illusions. What was he? Nothing. He was, as both Gentile and non-religious Jewish children of the era called each other in derision, a "spastic." True, he could run, and his reflexes were live wires, but, from hitting? Jews couldn't hit, never could. Their job in the mystery of things was to take on the kidney a baseball thrown by a tall Irishman or a giant Pole like Zelinka—people who were not afraid to punch, or jump off a waterfall, or ride a bicycle on a rope stretched between the Woolworth and Municipal buildings.

It didn't matter. Not only that, but what no one ever knew or could know was that, after the pitch, Roger always closed his eyes. It was then that he felt the arms, fluttering and feathered, golden and shiny, reach from behind him and slowly, viscously, take hold of his hands on the bat. The joy that this brought him, knowing that it was not he that held the bat, but an angel, made him float. No one ever looked at a batter's feet at the swing, but had anyone peered stereoscopically at the photographs of record, he would have seen that Roger's feet were held a quarter of an inch off the ground. He floated, and was happy. An angel supported him in his arms and gently held the bat, and, with eyes closed, Roger would swing with the angel.

He felt that, even were he betrayed, even were he to be abandoned, even were he to be humiliated in front of tens of thousands of Gentiles, it would be enough that he had had so intimate a discovery of so unpredictable a God. It would be enough that he had been promised, even were the promise not kept. It would be enough that in the House of Ruth, he had been clasped by an angel's wings and raised from the ground.

"The pitch!" Mel and Red said to the nation simultaneously.

Even with eyes closed, Roger could see the ball coming in, as white as the foam of a tidal wave, moving like a cannon shell, a piston, or a comet, with a power that made the air around it roar. Then this ball slowed most graciously into an almost rhythmical stillness. It glowed, pulsed, and seemed to grow to the size of the moon, and then dutifully stopped one foot in front of home plate, with glistenings, luminous rings, showers of ice, pinwheels of diamonds, and leaping sparks spinning from it. "Hit me!" it shouted, in the visible language of stopped and floating baseballs. "Hit me!"

Feathers pressed in unison against the limitlessly powerful wing, and the bat moved like a jet as the wings grew taut to slow it lest the ball be hit too hard, and when the two connected, the ball fled like a cat on fire. It went just slowly enough so that everyone in the stadium could track the flame, and track it they did, up at the angle of a useless fly, but so far up that its trajectory seemed aimed at the huge daylight moon loitering impudently above the Bronx.

Thirty thousand people dared not breathe. Their heads lifted and their eyes opened to the maximum as the ball flew from the stadium, clearing the flagpole by six-hundred feet, headed perhaps to Africa or Rio de Janeiro, over Orchard Beach. And as everyone followed it, Roger began to walk quietly toward first.

As the Yankee runs came in, the crowd grew hysterical on account of the frail unknown Yankee who brought up the rear and ran from third to home with uncanny spastic grace to win the game for the Yankees by one run, the only one of its kind in history. In the stands the Gentiles shook the pillars of the world with their shouts, and the Jews prayed silently, thankful to have been spared.

SOMEONE BROUGHT champagne to the locker room, and it was spilled wastefully over everyone. They picked up Roger and, dancing between the benches, carried him from place to place. One of the team held the bat and kissed it; then he elevated it above his head and marched around in triumph. They chanted in unison: "Ro-ger! Ro-ger! Ro-ger!"

Roger squiggled out of their grip and slid to the floor. "No!" he said, retrieving the airborne bat. "No!"

"No?" they asked.

"No," he said, pausing to regain his breath. He held the bat out in front of him on display. "This is the bat of God," he told them.

"The bat of God," they repeated in awe.

"No!" he said again.

"It isn't?" they asked.

"It is."

"Is it," they asked, "or isn't it?"

"It is," he confirmed, "but you may not worship it."

"Why not?" Berra asked. "God! It's the bat of God!"

"Yes," said Roger, "but you can't. If you worship it, you are worshipping only a thing that He made. He didn't even make it, He caused it to be made."

"So?"

"He made everything, so if you worship only one of those things, or any of them, or all of them, you are worshipping your own choice, and thus you are worshipping yourselves, which you must not do."

"What the hell are we supposed to do with the bat of God?" Mantle asked.

"Treat it," Roger said, remembering a song he had heard on the radio, "like a lady."

As the Yankees tried to assimilate this, everything was frozen, and amid the stillness, the doors of the locker room began to stretch inward with wavelike changes of pressure against them in advance of the sports press, which no force in the world could stop.

"Quick, Roger," Mantle said, "jump in the laundry cart."

Roger flew into a wheeled canvas hamper, and the Yankees covered him with towels. Then the doors burst open and what seemed like a thousand men with tickets in the brims of their gray hats flooded in like the tides of Fundy.

"Roger! Where's Roger Reeves!" they screamed.

"Who?" the Yankees asked.

The great crush of press was driven into a kind of seizure, which the Yankees much enjoyed. "Roger Reeves! He's a legend! He hit a ball . . ."

"Yes?" Mantle asked.

"He hit a ball . . ." the reporter repeated, sweeping his left arm across an imaginary horizon, "out of the . . . out of the . . ."

"He went home for the weekend," Berra said. "He wants to spend the weekend with the former Crab Legs."

"In Milledgeville?" they asked.

"Yup," Berra said.

The wave that had burst in now evacuated with a sucking sound of withdrawn air, and the rest was silence. Roger popped up from the towels like a chick breaking out of an egg, and said, "I've got to get back to the hotel; I'm way behind in Mishnah."

"If this is a dream," Berra said, "then let it be your wishbone."

ROGER REFUSED to play away games, not only because of the difficulty in getting kosher food (which, like kosher food itself, was surmountable), but because he wanted to hit balls out of Yankee Stadium each time he was up at bat. He suggested, and Stengeleh agreed, that this might be good for the Yankees. The whole country was already in a fever, the press had ravaged Milledgeville and come up with not even one former Crab Leg, and the greater the mystery the more people wanted to know. There was no Roger Reeves in Milledgeville. Never had been. No one knew him. Who was he? Was he a robot? Had Roger Reeves shown up in public, anywhere, he would have been torn apart by gushing hands, but Roger Reveshze was free to walk about, entirely ignored.

As the fervor built, the Yankees played at Cincinnati and Roger rested for a Thursday game against Chicago. Every seat in Yankee Stadium was sold, and scalpers were disposing of tickets for a premium of one-thousand percent. The front pages of the tabloids for that entire week would be devoted to Roger: *Who Is Yankee Miracle Boy?*; *Reeves to Field Thursday*; *Never Again?*; *Stengel Says, "Watch!"*; *Reeves Unknown in Milledgeville*; and so on. Pictures of his face, many times enlarged, like photographs of the moon, appeared in the newspapers. Television ran slow- and stop-motion films of him again and again. Industries were born putting his name on mugs and cards, though not his image, for which they needed his permission, and would have paid dearly had they been able to receive it. The President was asked about him at his news conference, prompting the normally good-natured general to snap, "How the hell do I know? He's not a secret program. He doesn't work for the government. Why are you asking me?"

Such fame, even pseudonymously, might have worked upon anyone other than someone who had received as the answer to his prayer the embrace of an angel. This coursed through Roger's veins like life itself. It put the world in a very clear light, even literally, illuminating in the texts Roger studied, for example, each Hebrew letter as if it were caught from every angle by miniature suns shining on it like spotlights. This gave the letters depth, and never had the texts themselves seemed so profound, brilliant, and beautiful. He was astounded to discover that these readings, which normally were only words, were now accompanied by music. The letters and words on the page, formerly black and black-gray, now shone like bright sun on burnished brass.

Though Roger had not seen the angel, he had felt its embrace and sensed a coolly burning orb. He guessed that this would be surrounded by souls of similar perfection gliding gracefully and unseen throughout their days.

THE WHITE Sox were a repulsive bunch of taciturn midgets whose throwing arms seemed attached to stolid blocks of steel. Whereas most pitchers were like supple human flyrods, the Sox were like trench mortars or doughnut machines. They never looked anyone in the eye, they had flat heads, and although they did everything to win, as long as they belched forward like steam shovels they really didn't care if they won or lost, which was lucky for them, because, after Roger took to the field and single-handedly prevented a single ball from touching the grass, they had to decharter their airplane and go home on a bus. The final score for this, Roger's second game, was Chicago nothing, Yankees 147.

The Yankees were regretful but too stunned by the whole situation not to accept that Roger would play only three more games. Sure to lose him, they yearned to know how he did it, so Stengel gingerly asked if he would hold a clinic for the rest of the team.

"A clinic?" Roger asked.

"A baseball clinic," Stengel said. "You know, teach them how to hit, how to field, how to run. You're only going to play three more games, and we thought, well, it'd be great if you could leave behind some of what you brought. We're doing okay now—I mean, look at the score against Chicago—but you never know. The way we were going this year, before you came. . . . We could lose it." He laughed nervously, not daring to bring up money, which he knew Roger would refuse.

"I don't know from baseball," said Roger, "not a thing."

Stengel bowed his head. "Really," he said, in awe.

"No."

"Then how did you . . . how did you . . ."

"That?" Roger asked.

"Yes, Roger," Stengel said politely, "that."

"I could tell them what I do know."

Stengel looked at Roger, who was illuminated in fading reddish-brown light. He was less than half Stengel's size. He didn't know the rules of baseball, much less the subtleties. By rights and the laws of physics he should not have been able, even had he connected with the ball, to have hit it beyond the diamond. A child of his size and underdevelopment would not be able to throw

the ball from home to second, much less leap twenty feet in the air (as he had done in the Sox game) and then get the ball off on a flat trajectory to burn into the catcher's mitt at home plate before the thrower was back on the ground. "Yes," said Stengel, "tell us what you do know."

"Okay," said Roger, "but I'm telling you, I don't know anything."

That was not quite true. He had begun to think about the game. For example, he liked very much that the ball was an object descending from heaven, and he thought of it, therefore, not as an object to be captured for the glory of the captor but as a gracious gift that brought with it in train a bit of the loveliness of the sky.

FOR THE seminar, the Yankees went to their secret practice field at Lake Honkus, near Mo-honk, in the Shawangunks. The Yankees had bought a secluded estate and set up a baseball field on what had been a cow pasture, where they could practice in secret their surprise plays and coded signals. The lodge where they stayed was filled with wrought iron, Indian blankets, and buffalo heads. In fact, in Roger's room, he and a moose had a staring contest for at least an hour.

The next morning, Roger and the Yankees put away a huge breakfast, during which Roger discovered that the maple syrup the Yankees used on their pancakes was kosher, and made an interesting sauce for pickled herring. Then they went outside and sat on benches facing a portable blackboard. The weather was wonderfully cool and clear at Lake Honkus. Stengel brought Roger up to the front, stood him next to the blackboard, gave him a piece of chalk, and said, "Kid, we're totally secure."

Roger looked at the Yankees, who looked at him expectantly. What could he possibly say that would enable them to hit a ball out of the park or jump twenty feet in the air?

"From baseball I know nothing," he began, "but what's a lock?"

"What's a lock?" Mantle echoed.

Roger nodded.

"You mean like a lock on a door," Larsen asked, "or a lock in a canal?"

"Both," said Roger.

"A door lock is a metal thing with a lot of really smart junk in it," Berra said.

"Okay," said Roger, "and the lock of a canal?"

"A chamber for raising and lowering boats, with water from the river or canal to run it."

"Yes," said Roger.

Time passed. The Yankees stared at Roger. More

time passed. Then Roger said, "Both illustrate the mechanism of the world."

The Yankees inched forward. No clinic had ever begun like this.

"God is perfect," Roger said. "His creation is perfect. It doesn't seem so to us—we who suffer and die, who must live with sadness and terror—because we can't see it in its entirety. If we could, we would see that it is in perfect balance. The counterweight for which we long—to right wrongs and correct injustices—is sometimes far away from us in space, time, or both. But, taken as a whole, from far enough afield, all is in balance, all is just."

"Good. What does this have to do with baseball and locks? As set out in the teachings of Rabbi Pepper of Biloxi and Rabbi Goldfinch of Barnevelt, the modern-day disciples of Rabbi Yoel ben Isaac of Zamosc and his grandson Rabbi Yoel ben Uri (whose last names I will not say), each a *baal shem*, and their descendants, et cetera, in God's eyes, in fact, and in truth, all souls, absent the deficit of sin, are equal. For example, a wise and brilliant king has no higher rank in the view of the Almighty than a beggar who has not even the comprehension to speak his own name. At the final judgment, both souls can glow equally in the same circle of continuous light."

The Yankees nodded slightly. They understood; they had all deeply loved those who were far from perfect.

"Okay," said Roger. "So here is the question that Yoel ben Isaac put forth and Yoel ben Uri answered. If these souls occupy the same level at the end, equally beloved of God, and if God's creation is perfect, how can an imbalance exist in their lives on earth? How can one suffer all the miseries of this life, and the other know all the glories, if in the end every account is to be reconciled and they come to the same reward? In a perfect universe, how can such a shortfall exist? How can God allow it?"

Not even the entire Yankee lineup could answer this question, though they strained to do so. Roger again challenged them. "Tell me, how can God allow it? Do you know?" He surveyed them. They didn't. "I'll tell you, then. It's simple. He doesn't. What is equal in the end is equal also in the beginning and in the middle. There is no deficit even on this earth, even in the smallest picture, the tightest section of view. But how can this be? The king and the beggar live vastly different lives. Ah! That's what you think. That's what may be apparent. But it isn't true. Why? Because," he said to the Yankees, their eyes unblinking, "the mechanism of creation is like a lock."

The Yankees waited. How was it like a lock, both kinds?

"Both kinds. The metal lock has a cylinder that, for the door to open, must turn. This cylinder has a row of holes drilled in it, in which rest pins. In the barrel inside of which the cylinder turns and is encased, is a line of holes spaced exactly like their counterparts in the cylinder, with its own set of pins. In the locked position, the pins from the barrel fall into the holes in the cylinder and prevent it from turning, because they cross and block the interface. When the key is put in, it raises the pins exactly to the points—at a different level in each hole—where the barrel pins are above the line and the cylinder pins are below it. If all the pins were raised indiscriminately, sometimes the cylinder pins would block the interface, and sometimes the barrel pins would. If they were not raised at all, the barrel pins would block the interface and, thus, the rotation. To allow the turning, each pin must be raised according to what it requires. Some are raised more, some less, which is why the key is jagged. In the end, its unevenness makes a perfect equality that allows the lock to open.

"And a lock that lifts or lowers a boat is a mechanism that gets its power from the urge of all water to find its own level. Only that way can things flow, rivers run, and the world function—when the disparate forces of the universe are conjoined, and rest easy in an equality of perfection. Every force that exists is held in balance by a counterpart with which it must be united, and with which it is united, even if the connection be not apparent to us.

"Like the pins in a lock, the beggar and the king are lifted by God variously and invisibly, but equally, even in this world, so that the perfection will not be broken, for, by definition, the perfection cannot be broken. They ride unseen waves and are held aloft by unseen supports. Were they not so lifted, the world would not work.

"Only those who have suffered can know the strength of the compensation they acquire. The emissary that comes to them is all-embracing, and though some may deny or mock this, it is many times more real than the world itself, for next to this working of perfection the world itself seems only a tinsel of the imagination. God compensates even in this world. He must. He does. And the reception of His compensation, like a quantity of physics, is the certain though insubstantial thing we call holiness. Those who would deny it would do so simply from lack of having received it. Perhaps the king, gifted in other ways, has no knowledge of holiness, while for the beggar with no gifts, it is overflowing. You may wonder what this has to do with baseball."

They nodded.

"It seems clear to me," he said, as a breeze brought resinous air from a thick pine forest that bordered the practice field as evenly as a crewcut. "I have been able to do what I did because my arm was guided, my strength supplied, my speed achieved, by the ever-present will of God for balance and perfection. Perhaps a Phoenician ship listed too much to port, thousands of years ago; or it was too cloudy, for too long, over a glacier in the Himalayas; or a woman's heart was broken for a day by her suitor in Montana. I don't know. I do know that it is important to know that such balances exist, and that, if I didn't know it, I wouldn't have the heart to continue."

"Can we hook into this stuff?" Berra asked.

"Not if all you want to do is win games," Roger answered.

"**B**UT WAIT a minute," Berra demanded. "Let's say someone cheated in Chinese checkers a thousand years ago in Peru. If I could hook into that, I could run twenty feet back to the plate even though Zelinka is just an inch from it, and put him out, right?"

"No," said Roger. "It doesn't necessarily work that way, and God is not fond of games."

"Even baseball?"

"Even baseball."

"Why?"

"Games can become, because of their closed set of rules, an independent universe, a distraction from the seeking of perfection. If they are taken as a universe in themselves, what a meager universe that is. This offends God, who worked for six whole days to make the universe we have. Can you imagine what would come of the work of an omnipotent being for six whole days? What is the infinity of detail, the infinity of extent, the infinity of connectedness, and the infinity of surprise, times six?"

"It doesn't apply to baseball?" Stengel asked, not quite sure of exactly what *it* was.

"If your object is merely to play baseball, it doesn't."

"What's your object, then, Roger?" Mantle asked.

"Because of the imperfection I have seen, I live for the hope of restoration. That's all I live for, even if it be a sin."

"What imperfection?" Stengel asked.

Roger's expression was incomprehensible to the Yankees as anything but some sort of nervous ailment, because boys his age who are not afflicted with a crippling disease do not show on their faces the pain of old men. "I was born during the war," he said, to answer the question, "in a place called Majdanek. I knew nothing else. The physical privation of this place, the terror of the selections and the frequent

killing of people around me, seemed natural. Until I was three, I existed in the aura of my parents' love. I don't know what they did to keep us alive, but I know that whatever it was it was done for me. I stop abruptly when I begin to imagine what they must have suffered, especially my mother. For this I pray with love and gratitude, every day. I wish it were they who had lived and I who had died, although that would have taken from them what they wanted most.

"Just before the liberation, when I was three, we were marched out and made to stand at the edge of a pit. In the pit were thousands of bodies. Bulldozers had compressed and shaped them. They were as white as snow, and beneath them was a lake of blood. Even among the crushed forms and severed limbs, some people remained alive, though not for long.

"My mother and father told me that they loved me. They tried to shield me with their bodies. When the firing began, the force of the machine-gun bullets caught them and the other adults and they were hurled into the pit as if a wind had blown them away. The firing had been over the heads of the children, who stood on the rim untouched and unable to move. The guns were not lowered, because bullets were scarce.

"A soldier came by and picked me up by both ankles. My head hit the ground, and then he swung me around like an ice skater swinging his partner. I remember the blood rushing to my head, and the world blurring into blue and white. Even as I was twirled, the soldiers were laughing. After I was released, for a moment, I flew. Undoubtedly, I passed over my mother and father, and though I thought I was going to fly forever, I fell into the center of the pit, face-to-face with a dead woman upon whom I had fallen, whose mouth was open.

"I thought I was dead, too, until the bulldozers drove over us. The sound of bones breaking was like the sound of burning kindling. Many times, the bulldozer drove right over me, but though I was too frightened to move, I found myself each time between the treads. Then I was caught in a wave of tumbling bodies that, pushed by the blade, washed up at the edge. The bulldozer no longer came near me. I lay quietly as it worked, and then slept.

"After nightfall, I was awakened as I was wetted with gasoline. Choking on it, I climbed over the rim and walked into the darkness. I thought that this was death and that I was dead, but when I looked back and saw the huge blaze of the fire in which my mother and father were burning, I knew that I was still alive. I knew the difference. I wanted to die, I wanted very much to die, but, not knowing how, I lived.

"That is the imperfection I have seen," he said, "and all I want from the world is some indication or sign that, forward in time, or where time does not exist, there is a justice and a beauty that will leap back to lift the ones I love from the kind of grave they were given."

THE POOR Orioles. They had no idea what was going to happen to them when the Yankees took the field in Roger's third game. Though they knew to be concerned with Roger himself, they had closely studied the first two of his games and saw hope in the fact that in these the other Yankees had played only marginally better. If they could isolate Roger, the rest of the Yankees would still be the Yankees Brooklyn had beaten in the Series the year before. Their rivals in the Bronx, they thought, still lacked focus.

But when the Yankees returned to the Bronx from Lake Honkuk they did have focus, albeit of an unusual sort. They appeared to be bent on a certain kind of vengeance that was entirely alien to and had never been seen in baseball. True, baseball had its fierce moments, and sometimes teams were arrogantly knit together into bands of primitive warriors who pressed their case in a way that knocked the wind out of their fans. When the outfielder Whitey Koski was deliberately struck in the head, or so it seemed, by the pitcher Chick Perkasky, so concentrated and angry were Koski's teammates that they burned up the rest of the game. With home run after home run, and fielded balls thrown back with the force of cannon fire, they astonished the spectators, of whom they had become totally unaware. When Doug Little and Kevin Small, two Giants, were attacked by drunks hurling coconuts during an exhibition game in Sarasota, the Giants came alight with heavy hitting and flame-thrower pitching. For two weeks they beat every team they played, and then, when their anger dissipated, they returned to their losing streak.

Such things were expected of teams whose players had been struck by fastballs or kneed when sliding, but why the Yankees? The Yankees were in the midst of the most spectacular rise baseball had ever seen. Why would they be angry? Why would they be grim? No one had suffered indignity or abuse. If anything, they could be expected to be sheepish and self-conscious about their inexplicable good fortune and the fact that now they all had Cadillacs.

This is, anyway, what the Orioles had been counting on. Nonetheless, the Orioles saw out on the green lawn the faces not of baseball players but of soldiers. When he didn't smile, Berra

looked even more like a turtle, and he refused to be engaging. The Oriole batters felt pure concentration emanating from him as he crouched at the limit of their peripheral vision. Mantle looked no longer like a farm boy but rather like the ruthless head of a giant steel corporation. The boyishness in his eyes had disappeared and been replaced by a metallic coldness. Larsen didn't bother to touch the brim of his hat or adjust anything before his pitches, each of which seemed designed to break Berra's wrists. All the Yankees—except Roger, who remained mild (because the world into which they had just entered, and in which they would stay for only a short time, was his forever)—had an intense impatience that changed their timing to something such as no one had seen.

Baseball is like a clock, in that its wheels turn at different speeds and all its moves require waiting. Eventually, everything pops at once: the detents lift, springs decompress, arms rise, and hammers strike twelve times, even if only twice a day. Most of the time, however, is spent waiting for one wheel to align with another. So it is with baseball and its glorious pauses, which cannot be rushed and which even the announcers mimic with genius. Were the empty spaces to be compressed or done away with, the game would die.

Driven by emotion, the Yankees played a game with few spaces, little hesitation, and no rest. To describe just a small part of the Orioles' nightmare, which took place within the span of a hot-dog transaction, Larsen pitched without a warm-up, firing the ball across the plate at a hundred miles an hour. The batter swung late, and before he was finished with his swing Berra had thrown the ball back to Larsen as fast as a pitch. Immediately after the ball ploughed into Larsen's glove, he pitched it, and the batter, who had barely taken up position, swung again. This was repeated, and, within twenty-three seconds of the first pitch, the batter was out and gone.

When the next Oriole hit a fly to third, Rocky Babis, a new guy covering the base, harvested it and instantaneously rammed it across the diamond to first, where the Oriole Brutus Evans was tagged before he got back to base, making three outs. At the instant Evans was tagged, the Yankees sprinted in, and the next Yankee up stood impatiently at the plate before the Orioles were even out of their dugout, which, not surprisingly, gave the Orioles an incurable case of the heebie-jeebies.

The *Daily News* now referred to the Yankees as "the Invincible Engine." Although Larsen was not pitching perfect games, his pitching was astound-

ingly quick and deadly. As a team, New York had become the model of a grim and efficient army that fights an unspeakable enemy and is reconciled and devoted to its tasks. Roger's last three games and quite a few afterward were played not as games but as tributes. The Yankees no longer cared about their standing in the league or their chances for the pennant or in the Series. They did not care about their salaries and bonuses. They did not care that children ran up to them in the streets and women watched glowingly as they passed. They did not even care about winning: winning, for them, became joyless. They wanted only to play to perfection and to rush it on, as symbol and sign, to speak directly to God, and to face like men the fact of evil and sorrow in the world.

And they played so beautifully, so well, and so apparently with something higher in mind, that the announcers really did not know what to say—except that they would always remember, and that something had turned that summer to gold.

ROGER'S LAST game was in late September, on the dry cloudless day that confirmed to all that summer was finally over. October would bring some heat now and then, but this was the signal that New York's bejeweled fall had begun, when sharp shadows brought depth and reflection, and because of the declination of the light the rivers looked their bluest. Sounds, too, were sharper, and better sustained on the cool dense air, and no longer was everything blurred by the summer vapor that fills-in the channels of sight and sound.

Everyone knew that the Yankees would be on Detroit like a tidal wave. Bookies were giving odds of ten-thousand to one. And for a team on its way to face a firing squad, the Tigers were in a festive mood. They looked forward to the exhibition, to watching Roger hit balls out of the park, and to winning, perhaps, if not the game, a rich pool based on the point spread: the most daring Tiger had placed his stake on a spread of nine-hundred runs.

Buoyed by the summer's place in history and coffers overflowing from the unprecedented gate since June, not to mention the miraculous improvement of the team and the likelihood of its coming back to beat the Dodgers in the Series, Stengel simply announced that this would be Roger's last game. As Berra always said, "The middle is the end of the road for the beginning," and Roger was going back to the South (Milledgeville, Stengel had confessed to the public, had been a feint), to a small town

that, to preserve his and its privacy and peace, would remain unknown.

When people heard this, they ached. Although the sports press had never stopped trying, Roger had never been interviewed, and the public had exactly the image of him it wanted. He was the ideal and paradigmatic American—lanky, side-burned, taciturn, unmarried, young, rich (they thought), mysterious, and devout. Had he run for President he could have won by a landslide even in a non-election year, and that fall the presidential campaign was in full swing. Harvard invited him to be its president, the Treasury to be on medallions, Wheaties to be on the box. Commercial offers were so lucrative that, had he taken all thousand of them and bargained well, he could have been the richest man in the world.

But all Roger wanted to do was go home, where no one would know anything about what had occurred in baseball that summer—except that a Jewish player had been a brief sensation. Even Schnaiper would not grasp the significance of what had happened, and would not in any case realize that its agent had been the new boy who fetched *gribeness* for the rebbe. The Yankees would keep his secret and never call on him, content that he had helped them this one time, because this was what he had asked of them.

After the game, he would stay in the locker room until early evening. Dressed again in hasidic clothing, he would shoulder the books he had not already sent home by book post, and walk out of the deserted main gate, as obscure as he had been when he walked in. He would get on the subway and go back to Brooklyn, where he would continue doggedly the task of his life. But there was one more game to play, the most unusual game ever played in the history of baseball.

The Yankees were up, and because everyone knew the Tigers would never come in from the field, chairs were brought for every Tiger player except the pitcher. Next to the chairs were little tables with ice buckets, bottles of Coke and lemonade, and snacks. A hundred thousand people filled Yankee Stadium, double its capacity, and in the South Bronx and upper Manhattan millions had gathered, packing the avenues, cramming into all the empty spaces, their faces turned toward home plate, even though the three television networks were broadcasting live. Inexplicably, the rules had been changed, and Roger would pinch hit for everyone on his team, even Mantle. After the national anthem and ten minutes of prayer, Roger walked onto the field.

HE WAS greeted with the longest, loudest, most extraordinary cheer that had ever been raised, a hundred-thousand voices amplified by the hornlike shape of the stadium, and a million more following on in the street. Though he knew he deserved no such thing, he was pleased nonetheless—because he understood that they were not cheering for him even if they did not know it—and he bowed his head to honor what they were cheering. Not mistakenly, they thought that this was a sign of humility, which set alight a self-sustaining, self-replicating, waxing roar that rose for a half-hour and tumbled from the stadium on waves of thundering air that could be heard from Kingsbridge to Canarsie.

Mantle gave the bat to Roger, who walked gangly-legged to the plate. When the umpire shouted “Play ball!” the cheer went up again and did not die for fifteen minutes. Then, when all was quiet, Roger turned crisply to the pitcher. The pitcher wound up and sent a one-hundred-mile-per-hour fastball screaming at the umpire, for the catcher, who was eating poppyseed cake, sat on a chair off to the side.

The ball that came in at a hundred miles per hour left at quadruple that speed, whining briefly through the air before it disappeared in the pure blue, forty degrees above the top of the flagpole. The fans were wild, but then settled in to simple euphoria as Roger hit pitch after pitch high over the Bronx toward Africa and the South Atlantic. The pitcher was supplied with one ball after another by teammates standing next to huge bins of baseballs on the sidelines. After a hundred desperate throws, his relief came onto the field and stood behind him, and when his arm gave out the relief pitcher took over so as not to break the rhythm of Roger’s drives.

Roger was lost in the soundless incantations that affirm the truth of truths. The pattern of the vast numbers of baseballs streaming over the wall was like a cloth of ghostly white threads, or seeds sown in a light and helpful breeze. Four-hundred-mile-per-hour baseballs pierced the air and whistled over the Bronx in a song, while the announcers said virtually nothing. “Let’s just look on as this unfolds,” they had said, forgetting that they were on the radio and that people listening could not see what they saw, “for it will never be this way again.” And, then, counting under their breath, they joined their audience in subdued amazement as the balls flew by in steady procession, like raindrops speeding sideways in a gale. Two thousand of them were shot from the stadium that day. There might have been more, but Roger stopped at the even number, which he thought might be a record. It was.

The players, the management, the professionals, the sportswriters, and the fans were aware that, before Roger, they had never seen a ball hit from the stadium, and that they never would again. To see two thousand in a row, without a miss, without hesitation, pause, or variations in path or timing except those that he willed, was as if God had chosen that moment to make His presence known, and they reacted accordingly in wonder and delight. For the moment, at least, they felt as if the deepest circles within them had been squared, their ragged doubts knit smooth, and the world were ablaze with the light of perfection.

ROGER HAD long since tired of the suite in which he lived in deadening luxury on the Upper East Side. It was now empty, as it was empty before his arrival, a rosewood and alabaster tomb without even a body, a columbarium without ashes. In that neighborhood it was fairly easy to get a Fabergé egg but almost impossible to get a kosher chicken. True, the dwellings were well kept and well appointed, they often were as high as birds' nests, and you could look out and see a half-million windows and not a foot of fire-escape iron, but the difference between this place and where he lived in Brooklyn was like the difference between a wool suit on a hanger, and a lamb. There were those who would instinctively choose the suit, and those who would instinctively choose the lamb. It was not for Roger to criticize anyone who would take the suit, but he himself would gather the lamb into his arms.

So with the place where he lived, a jumble of ancient brick in a basket weave of black iron that lay upon the tenements like fishing net sprawled to dry across a city of crates. The streets had no prospect and were tight and twisting. Only from the rooftops could you catch a glimpse of ships and blue water, and the trees, being so few and rare, were achingly beautiful.

Roger's affection for the awkward and homely way in which he lived had not diminished, and it began to enfold him graciously even as he headed out of the stadium's main gate. It was the way his parents had lived, and the way their parents had lived, and so forth, and so on, very far back. But it would be a sin to carry on habit for its own sake, or to venerate the old merely because it is old. After all, given the expanse of the infinite, all that occurred did so within less than the duration of a spark, so everything was new and had to be judged for what it was. Tradition was an illusion, an afterimage—comfortable, yes, but unjustifiable in itself.

The ancient ritual, the black coats, the way of speaking, the languages, the revelations and com-

mentary, the candles, the cuisine, the marriage customs, and the fur-rimmed hats, were things as new as if they had just burst upon the world like the first rays of light. Pop. There they were. To think that they were old would be only a mistake of perspective. What made them what they were, and so different from everything else, was that each one carefully and deliberately put the things of the world in their place. Each was a declaration and vow, each the outcome of a battle in which reason strictly assigned them a post. And thus subdued, the things of the world were sweet, and the world rose, like a planet in ascension, to its proper position.

The subway, inexplicably elevated aboveground, rolled down its track, taking Roger home. It made many turns indirectly in directions different from the one in which he was headed, but the sum and subtraction of the departures would constitute the precision of the aim, and had the train gone merely in a straight line, it likely would have missed. It went noisily amid the appearance of a million gently burning lights that gradually took the place of the bright scales with which the setting sun had armored the face of every building. It went left, it went right, it lurched north, south, east, and west, but then it began its last dash toward Brooklyn like a dog following a trail.

Roger closed his eyes, and a world that once had been came alive in all its tender detail. His mother lived again in moments so taxing to him that it threatened his young heart. His father lived again. They moved in color and dimension, and as the train rushed forward the world doubled back upon itself, twisting immeasurably, confounding time. In these moments, when it was as if he were observing them, unseen, they were, somehow, observing him. He could neither explain nor understand, but he was sure they knew.

When the train rose gracefully onto the bridge and sped with immensely complex clacking over iron rails in an open box of steel held in the wind a hundred feet above the river, the sound made Roger open his eyes. There was the world clear in the night, its sparkling towers piercing a band of brilliant orange light. For a moment, and just a moment—for he had work to do—he thought about what had happened. What had happened was but a single, lovely note in an always urgent song that he had been brought up to sing, like those before him, in protest of mortality, hope of survival, and love of God. It had happened here, in the New World, and why not? If Ruth could, among the alien corn, begin the line in Judah that led to David, then what was not possible here, and what perfection would be disallowed?

Is Russia Going Backward?

Leon Aron

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following essay was completed for publication before the terrorist slaughter in Beslan in early September.*

THE NEWS from Russia has been decidedly grim. Most accounts begin with the prosecutorial assault on the oil giant Yukos and its founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the politically ambitious “oligarch” who is now on trial in Moscow on charges of fraud after almost a year in jail. But they hardly end there.

To many, the Yukos case raises the specter of a historic reversal. If, in the early 1990's, Boris Yeltsin led a revolution that oversaw the dismantling of state ownership of the economy, now the Kremlin under Vladimir Putin appears to be reextending its control over industry. Some observers even fear an across-the-board renationalization of the country's largest private firms. Possible signs of this include the recent abrupt halt in the breakup and sale of the government-owned electricity monopoly, UES, and the announced intention of the state to increase its majority stake in the natural-gas behemoth Gazprom.

The rule of law in Russia has also suffered grievously in the prosecution of Khodorkovsky. A progressive criminal-procedure code, adopted with great fanfare at the end of 2001, has been twisted to the breaking point. Irregularities in the proceedings—

including blatant violations of the rules of pretrial detention, bail, and lawyer-client privilege—have undermined public confidence in the independence of judges. Adding further to the impression of legal regression are two trials for espionage that have been similarly rife with procedural violations.

Of perhaps even greater concern than all this is the mounting pressure to curtail political liberties. In the Yukos affair, the Kremlin has seemed less intent on recovering billions of allegedly lost tax revenues than on scaring off the captains of post-Soviet industry from participation in national politics. Elsewhere, freedom of political speech has been restricted as the state has consolidated its grip over the four national television channels and shut down some of the most outspoken news and entertainment programs. Putin's 72-percent landslide in the presidential elections this past March, following the resounding triumph of the pro-Putin party in parliamentary elections last December, has been widely attributed to manipulation of public opinion by the state-controlled media.

Encroachments on freedom of expression have been matched by restrictions on freedom of assembly. No sooner did the new Duma convene than it passed a law barring political demonstrations in central locations or close to government buildings. In his lengthy state-of-the-nation address in May, Putin lashed out at unnamed non-governmental organizations (NGO's) whose “sole interest,” he declared, was to serve “dubious group and commercial interests” at

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the expense of the public good. (There are 350,000 registered NGO's in Russia today.)

Accompanying these statist currents at home has been a more assertive posture abroad. Among other things, the Kremlin has insisted on keeping or has let its troops linger overlong in bases outside Russia from which it had previously agreed to withdraw. The savage war in Chechnya continues to grind forward, with daily violations of human rights by federal troops attempting to suppress an ongoing Islamic insurgency. The Kremlin has denounced the American invasion of Iraq and has been providing nuclear technology and fuel to Iran.

Taken together, these developments would indeed seem to betoken a major turnabout from the revolutionary achievements of the 1990's. Increasingly, there is talk in the Russian air of a "Soviet restoration." This prospect, now a worry of Russian human-rights activists and Putin's political opponents on the Right and the Left, is also beginning to be entertained by expert opinion and many journalists in the West. Is it a serious possibility?

GREAT REVOLUTIONS are almost invariably followed by a successful or at least attempted "restoration" of some sort. It is entirely natural that formerly dominant elites should seek to stage a comeback and regain their lost perquisites and power. Writing about the French revolution, Tocqueville observed how "many of the laws and administrative methods that were suppressed in 1789 reappeared a few years later, much as some rivers after going underground re-emerge at another point, in new surroundings." In Russia today, we are observing in part a similar geological process. The cadres that effectively owned the USSR's politics and economy—the law-enforcement functionaries, the bureaucrats from the major economic ministries, and the KGB officers who still fill the top and middle ranks of the security services—have advanced under Putin to the forefront of national decisionmaking.

Yet, as with all successful restorations, one must be careful not to confuse broad-based backward shifts with a putsch or a counterrevolution initiated from above. The upper levels of political life in today's Russia are heavily influenced by popular sentiment. As public-opinion polls attest, that sentiment has shifted—away from the desire to nullify the ancien régime in every respect and toward a wish to recover some of its traditional symbols, institutions, and policies. After a decade of dizzying change, there is an intense longing among Russians for predictability and the comforts of the familiar. Thus, in one recent

nationwide survey asking what Russians expected from "a president of their choice," the two top replies were "securing a fair distribution of income in the interests of common people" and "strengthening of law and order."

These attitudes have translated into broad approval of Putin's efforts to curtail the often brazen presence of the "oligarchs" in Russian political life (including the near-ownership of the previous Duma by the Khodorkovsky-led oil lobby). The same attitudes undergird the tighter control being exercised by the center over the provinces, which are perceived by most Russians as little more than the personal fiefdoms of corrupt and dictatorial governors. Above all, such attitudes fortify the resolve of those pressing for more effective enforcement of the laws, for a secure public order, and for greater protection of the weak and the poor.

Under these circumstances—and, as we shall see, with the economy growing at its fastest pace in 40 years—it would have been strange if Putin's widely publicized moves had *not* made him immensely popular. Manipulation of the media and other electoral shenanigans were hardly required in order to secure his lopsided triumph at the polls.

But if what is unfolding in Russia today is indeed some sort of popular restoration, it is a most peculiar one. For millions of Russians, Putin has come to embody not a return to the bad old days but a balance, precarious though it may be, between the new and the old. Unlike his two immediate predecessors, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, Putin was never a high-level Communist-party functionary. A lieutenant colonel in the KGB's foreign-intelligence directorate, he resigned in the wake of the attempted putsch by Communist hardliners in August 1991. Thereafter he let his party membership lapse and went on to serve under Anatoly Sobchak, the first elected mayor of the renamed St. Petersburg and one of Russia's most radical and passionate anti-Communists.

To be sure, Putin himself is hardly governing as Sobchak would have done; the combination is more subtle and even contradictory than that. He has, for instance, prodded the Duma to adopt a new national anthem, set to the music of the old Soviet one; among his other public acts, he has presided over the unveiling of a plaque to Yuri Andropov, the longtime KGB chairman and, briefly, general secretary of the Communist party. At the same time, however, he has deplored the "totalitarian regime that brought the country to a national catastrophe" and told an interviewer that "we are obliged to remember everything

negative, everything horrible that we encountered in the 20th century. We have paid a very great price for this. Millions of people died in the camps."

This mixture of attitudes extends beyond symbols and words into the realm of policy, which is where one must really look to understand the direction in which Russia is moving. The simplest way to proceed is by reference to the four cornerstones on which Boris Yeltsin sought to build a post-Soviet Russia.

FIRST AND foremost is what might be called the de-Bolshevization of society—the very area in which Putin's transgressions have been most conspicuous. Early in his first term in office, Putin launched a concerted effort to tame the mass media, specifically by attacking the media empire of Vladimir Gusinsky. The move, dressed up as a lawsuit against the magnate's holding company by a group of lenders and shareholders, was clearly designed as political payback for the way in which Gusinsky had deployed his outlets, particularly the NTV network, in support of the left-of-center nationalist opposition in the December 1999 Duma elections. NTV's "repossession" by the state-owned Gazprom abruptly halted most critical news coverage of the Kremlin, and particularly of the dirty war in Chechnya. There followed the cancellation of the immensely popular satirical show *Kukly* ("Puppets"), which for six years had skewered leading politicians, especially the president, his ministers, and top aides. The other three national networks, already state-owned, quickly trimmed their broadcasts to suit the Kremlin's sensibilities.

This is an unhappy story, but one must nevertheless add a number of important qualifications. First, even when subjugated to the will of the state, Russian television today is a far cry from what it was in the Soviet era, when the agitation-and-propaganda department of the Communist party's Central Committee exercised absolute control over the airwaves. Today, the nightly news broadcasts invariably lead off with stories of violent crime (with terrorism now added to the mix), poverty, corruption, incompetence, and other instances of general malfeasance by local (if not national) officials.

Second, unlike television, the print media are free. Standing in front of a newspaper kiosk in Moscow, anyone with enough Russian to make out the newspaper headlines will be exposed to the entire spectrum of opinion, from *Konservator* ("Conservative") on the right to the shrill nationalist-leftist, anti-Semitic *Zavtra* ("Tomorrow"), which almost invariably carries anti-Putin cartoons of the most vulgar and scurrilous kind. Among

those most critical are the quintessential publications of the intelligentsia: the Right-liberal weeklies *Novoe Vremia* ("New Times"), *Moskovskie Novosti* ("Moscow News"), and the left-wing *Novaya Gazeta* ("New Gazette").

Finally, to grasp the real state of Russian journalism one must look beyond the country's capital city. As Russia moves further and further away from the unitary and rigidly centralized state built by Stalin, it is more and more becoming a land of disparate regions. In addition to the four Moscow-based television networks, there are 750 broadcast or cable stations, an average of eight for each of the country's 89 regions. Almost 200 of these local stations are private, with the remainder owned or subsidized to various degrees by regional governments. Similarly, 7,000 of the country's 35,000 local newspapers and magazines are in private hands. An example is the *Provintsiya* media conglomerate, owned by a single entrepreneur, which publishes 30 newspapers in 29 regions. To this multiplicity of information channels we might also add the Internet, which already reaches some 14 to 21 million people, is even harder to control, and is expanding by leaps and bounds.

IF TODAY'S media cannot be compared to what prevailed in the Soviet era, the same is true of electoral politics. In fact, it is there, despite the concern within Russia and abroad over a growing "democratic deficit," that the totalitarian past is being steadily repudiated.

Under Yeltsin, the old Communist party re-emerged as the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), a hardline, anti-Semitic, and Stalin-worshipping organization; under Putin, it began its journey into the dustbin of history. From 40 percent of the national vote in the presidential runoff election in 1996, and 25 percent of the party-list vote in the December 1999 Duma balloting, the KPRF's share was reduced to 12 percentage points last December. Polls this past summer showed the party's sharp downward trajectory continuing. Although the credit belongs to Russian voters, the success of the Kremlin's policies has undoubtedly contributed to the party's decline.

The defeat of the KPRF at the ballot box points to the continuing significance of freely contested elections in Putin's Russia. Following their most recent debacle at the polls, the Communists accused the Kremlin of engaging in "black PR," echoing other opposition parties that have likewise pointed to media manipulation and election "irregularities." But these irregularities, some of them well-documented, have been perpetrated overwhelmingly by local au-

thorities. In the last presidential race, election posters and leaflets of all candidates were mounted on billboards and handed out house to house across Russia. The names of all of Putin's rivals were on the ballot, and people were free to vote for the candidate of their choice. In the end, 68 million voters did so, and 15 million of these voted for Putin's rivals. Asked if they had enjoyed the opportunity to express their position freely, 87 percent answered in the affirmative. Meanwhile, in the provinces, self-rule continues to solidify; voters re-elect or retire governors based largely on the state of the local economy, and neither incumbency nor the support of the Kremlin has proved to be a guarantee against defeat at the polls.

As for the charge of media manipulation, we have already seen that the federal government's control of television is not absolute. Indeed, in the month preceding the most recent presidential election, the five candidates vying with Putin enjoyed a total of 65 hours on the three state-owned national television networks and an equivalent amount of exposure on state-owned radio. Roughly equal access is the rule at the regional and local level as well. Political debate and political advertising remain uncensored, and can be freewheeling in the extreme. In the words of a popular political weekly, the nationally televised debates of the opposition candidates amounted to telling millions of Russians "three times a week that Putin is leading the nation in the wrong direction." One candidate, making use of free airtime on a national television network, ran a commercial declaring: "Enough lying, enough pseudo-reforms, enough thieving." These are hardly the slogans of a muzzled or intimidated opposition.

In brief, while Putin's sins against political and civil liberty have distorted the face of the Russian polity, thus far they have not made it unrecognizable.

A SECOND cornerstone of Russia's anti-Communist revolution was the privatization of the economy. In this arena, the assault on Yukos may well signal a more general counterattack, aimed at reclaiming at least some of the economy's "commanding heights" for the state. A neo-corporatist ideology seems to have emerged within both the Kremlin and the Duma. Its advocates tolerate large private enterprises, but only on condition of their total subservience to the state's political and economic agendas. Private control of extractive industries, now proclaimed "national patrimony," is under especially severe scrutiny, and foreign ownership or even co-ownership of such resources has become a neuralgic issue. Russia's enormously lucrative

oil industry, in which the state's share is now smaller than anywhere else in the world save the United States and Kazakhstan, may be only the first target in a wider pullback.

But once again the picture is in need of qualification and nuance. Even as it was tightening the screws on Yukos, the government announced in August that it would sell its entire stake in Russia's largest oil company, Lukoil; the buyer may well turn out to be a foreign company, with Houston-based ConocoPhillips among the top contenders. Last year, the Kremlin approved the \$7 billion acquisition of half of another Russian oil giant, TNK, by British Petroleum.

Meanwhile, in economic matters other than those involving the "commanding heights," it would be hard to find many countries with policies as *favorable* to business as Putin's Russia. Increasingly freed from the paralyzing resistance of the Communist-led opposition in the Duma, the Kremlin has pushed through many key measures that the opposition had succeeded in scuttling in the late Yeltsin era. These include legislation permitting the private ownership and sale of land for the first time since 1917; the breakup of the state electricity monopoly and the sale of its generating assets (a move, as we have seen, now stalled); and partial privatization of the mandatory payroll deduction for workers' pensions, a portion of which is now considered individual property that may be invested in private mutual funds.

From the beginning of the Putin era, tax relief appears to have been a top priority of the Kremlin. Having appointed an acolyte of the free-market theorist Friedrich Hayek as his personal economic adviser, the president has moved to slash taxes across the board. The income tax was pared to 13 percent and the corporate tax to 24 percent; the sales tax was eliminated; and the Kremlin began pushing for a sharp cut in the unified social tax, a move calculated to save private entrepreneurs an estimated \$10 billion a year.

These cuts, which have given Russia some of the lowest marginal tax rates in the world, have been supplemented by a tight lid on government spending. Immediately after his re-election, Putin cut the number of ministries and federal agencies from 30 to 17, trimming the size of the federal bureaucratic workforce by 20 percent.

The fruits of these policies, helped along handsomely by soaring world oil prices, have been nothing short of remarkable. Since 1999, GDP has grown by 38 percent; labor productivity is up by over 50 percent; real disposable income has

more than doubled; the poverty rate has fallen by a third; and unemployment has decreased by 19 percent. Russia today enjoys record budget surpluses, a strong ruble, diminishing inflation, and an improved debt rating. One of the most telling indicators of all can be found in agriculture, a sector that had been systematically destroyed by six decades of collectivization. Today, for the first time in a half-century, Russia has gone from being the world's largest importer of grain to a net exporter.

NO LESS stark a change, and of unsurpassed significance for both Russia and the world at large, is the country's continuing demilitarization—the third cornerstone of post-Communist Russia. Putin's Kremlin has neither reversed nor slowed the dismantling of the single military asset that justified the USSR's claim to superpower status: its strategic nuclear forces. Notwithstanding last year's spate of tests of intercontinental missiles, all of them designed to bolster patriotic pride and some of them embarrassingly unsuccessful, from the beginning Putin has urged the United States to agree to deeper cutbacks in nuclear warheads than even the Bush administration has been prepared to accept. In the end, in a three-page agreement whose very brevity stands in contrast to the heavy tomes of previous treaties, Moscow has undertaken to shrink its strategic arsenal to no more than 2,200 warheads by 2012, down from 10,000 at the end of the Soviet era.

Along the same lines, Putin has conspicuously refrained from changing the Yeltsin-engineered decline in military manpower from around 4 million to slightly more than 1 million men under arms. To the contrary: several months into his first term, the Kremlin announced plans to slash the armed forces by at least an additional 350,000 men. This reduction is part and parcel of reforms intended to shorten the duration of compulsory service and ultimately to switch to an all-volunteer force. Although the plan has been delayed and diluted in the face of fierce resistance from the military, Putin nevertheless featured it prominently in his most recent state-of-the-nation address, strongly suggesting it will receive renewed impetus in the months ahead.

Most significantly, Putin has followed the lead of his predecessor in trimming Russia's massive defense outlays. Yeltsin, after cutting military expenditure by 90 percent in 1992, then maintained it at a level of no more than 3 percent of GDP for the next seven years (down from a staggering 30 percent of GDP in the Soviet period). It is to

this radically reduced conception of the military to which Putin has basically adhered.

Even in 2003, a year the Russian treasury was flush with tax receipts, military spending remained somewhere between 2.8 and 3.7 percent of GDP. Though this year's expenditures are set to rise, possibly to as much as 4.6 percent, Putin continues to reject calls to invest the country's swelling reserves in military power, recognizing, as he recently put it, that these liberated resources have "provided the basic foundation for our economic development."

In this as in so much else, Putin's approach reflects a national consensus. Asked in a poll last fall how Russia could best assert its place in the world, 46 percent of respondents named "becoming more competitive economically," while only 21 percent mentioned "maintaining and rebuilding a strong military." In today's Russia, there is hardly a groundswell of support for reconstituting the mighty Red Army of yore.

THE FOURTH and final cornerstone of the post-Soviet revolution was a decisive shift in foreign policy. Though Russia has lately become more assertive—occasionally even truculent—on the world stage, the basic pro-Western direction established in the Yeltsin era remains unchanged, and in some respects has become more profoundly established.

To be sure, in dealing with the "near abroad"—the countries on its borders that constituted the former USSR—Russia has become much more forceful about what it regards as its national interests. Among other things, it has violated an agreement with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to withdraw its troops from the tiny "Trans-Dniester Republic" in Moldova. It refuses to evacuate bases in Georgia, defying the demands of the Georgian government. It continues to maintain an armed presence in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Russia has made it plain that it is determined to remain a regional superpower, backing its economic dominance with overwhelming military preponderance.

But this posture should not be misunderstood as a desire for "reunification" with any of the former Soviet republics. Even when a republic has been *keen* on rejoining Russia, as is the case with poverty-stricken Belarus under the erratic dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko, Moscow has continued to demur. Nostalgia for the glory of the USSR may be plentiful among Russians, but, as with support for military spending, the polls consistently show only a small fraction wishing to restore the Soviet Union.

When one looks further afield, at relations with the United States, the change toward a pro-Western stance is even more evident. Russia's continuing provision of nuclear technology to Iran, though highly disturbing, is motivated more by commercial than by ideological interests. And Putin's strong opposition to U.S. intervention in Iraq hardly reflects an across-the-board hostility to American interests. Nothing illustrates this better than Russia's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Within days, Putin elevated U.S.-Russian cooperation to a level never before conceivable. Overruling his own defense and foreign ministers, and ignoring howls of protests from the nationalist Left, he took steps to support the exercise of American power in Russia's own backyard, including permission for NATO and U.S. planes to fly over Russian and former Soviet territory. He has acquiesced in the stationing of U.S. and NATO troops on former Soviet bases in Central Asia, and initiated an unprecedented sharing of intelligence between Russian and Western secret services.

In all these actions, the Kremlin has once more been in synch with public opinion. Like Putin, huge majorities of Russians consistently opposed U.S. intervention in Iraq. But the same Russian majorities, undoubtedly influenced by their country's painful encounters with Islamic violence emanating from Chechnya, firmly support an anti-terrorism partnership with the United States. A February 2004 Pew survey found 73 percent of Russians favoring the "U.S.-led war on terrorism" and only 20 percent opposing. Only a third of Russians agreed that the U.S. has been "overreacting to terrorism." These numbers reveal a public more supportive of the U.S. than its counterparts in Germany, France, or even Great Britain.

TALK OF a "Soviet restoration" is thus, at this juncture, wildly overblown. A more pertinent question is whether Russia is on a path toward some form of authoritarianism.

The Putin regime has clearly shown a readiness to sacrifice some—by no means all—newly won liberties to obtain continuity and stability. But, although its policies are in many instances informed by popular nostalgia for the past, they do not seem to be inspired by Communist ideology, let alone to be guided by it. We still do not know whether its peculiar style of power will prove to be ephemeral, a product of a remarkable congruence between the vision of one man and a fleeting national mood, or something more lasting—and, if the latter, what that something will be. After 2008, at the close of

Putin's second term, will Russia revert to the no-holds-barred, ideologically polarized, and raucously partisan politics of the 1990's, or will it slide toward a new form of highly centralized control? At this point it is impossible to say.

Between those two extremes, in any event, a third possibility seems quite plausible—namely, that Putin will have succeeded in ushering in a political and economic arrangement that is more enduring, more stable, and more organic than what has gone before. If so, Russia's future development may proceed according to the "East Asian" model, in which an authoritarian but highly successful "modernizing" regime (think of South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand in the 1950's through the 1980's) eventually produces a middle class large enough and strong enough to bring into being a Western-style democracy.

Another, not unrelated possibility would be the emergence of a one-party democracy, as in Japan, Italy until the 1990's, post-apartheid South Africa, or, in a more corrupt and violent incarnation, Mexico prior to Vicente Fox. In such systems, there is little in the way of direct grassroots influence on policy-making at the national level, and the final disposition of the legislature, dominated by one party, is never in doubt. Yet there is genuine competition of elites within the ruling party, the press remains free, basic civil and political liberties are preserved, and opposition parties, although firmly and seemingly permanently outside the perimeter of real power, can campaign freely, are elected to parliament in non-threatening numbers, and win local mayoral and gubernatorial elections.

Such a model might prove attractive to a Russian public weary of bitterly contested visions of their country's future and, after decades of undergoing the politicization of every aspect of life, eager to attend to their private affairs. Would it be entirely surprising if the Russian people chose to take a long holiday from national politics, leaving this largely to the elites, while keeping local politics lively and competitive?

But again, it is too soon to say. Apart from the battles of the 1990's, the Russian political temperament has never been tested by periods of peaceful and free choices. We shall have to wait patiently until, like other great revolutions before it, Russia's unfolds and reveals its final destination. All we can say today is that, severely handicapped though it is by its past, and with all the backslidings and shortcomings of the present, Russia's epochal experiment in liberty, popular self-rule, and non-belligerency is still far from over.

—August 27, 2004

Jewish Security & Jewish Interests

Jack Wertheimer

SIX DECADES after the Holocaust, a new wave of anti-Semitism has swept the globe, spearheaded by radical Muslims in the Middle East and Europe but taken up with gusto in democratic Western society not only by right-wing nationalists and neo-Nazis but by liberal and left-wing “anti-Zionists.” With frightening regularity, Jews have been assaulted either physically or in venomous words, synagogues and community centers have been bombed or incinerated in places as far-flung as Turkey, Tunisia, Argentina, England, and France, anti-Zionist rallies on American college campuses have deteriorated into anti-Jewish harangues, and Jews and Israelis have been blamed for everything from using the blood of Palestinian children for baking matzah to masterminding the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Surveying this situation, Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League has concluded that Jews “currently face as great a threat to the[ir] safety and security . . . as the one . . . faced in the 1930’s—if not a greater one.”

Foxman’s words stand in need of qualification. For one thing, the nature of today’s challenge differs markedly from the Nazi menace; for another, levels of violence and overt prejudice in the United States are considerably lower than they were in the 1930’s,

and much lower than they are in Western Europe or Canada, let alone in the Middle East. But it is certainly understandable that Jews today, including American Jews, have been left feeling more vulnerable than at any time since the end of World War II, or that this sense of insecurity should be reflected in the shifting priorities of Jewish institutions. So it is that the battle against anti-Semitism and the defense of Israel have once again come to dominate the work of many of the major communal agencies, overshadowing most of the other items—education, religious renewal, cultural creativity—that had been high on the agenda only a decade ago.

To some limited degree, today’s circumstances have also forced a general rethinking of where Jewish interests lie. To put it mildly, such a rethinking is long overdue. For even if anti-Semitism had not exploded on the international scene with such ferocity, unfolding trends within the United States should long ago have compelled the organized Jewish community to reassess its alliances and its political strategies, and to reconsider certain deep-seated habits of mind.

SIMPLY STATED, the approach to Jewish security still employed by most Jewish communal agencies was devised well over a half-century ago, when the composition of American society, and the relative influence of its various constituent elements, were vastly different from what they are today. At the mid-

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point of the 20th century, the U.S. population was overwhelmingly white (87 percent) and Protestant (67 percent), and its Protestantism was primarily of the mainline stripe. Since immigration had slowed considerably, largely due to the quotas put in place in the 1920's, no major changes in the composition of American society appeared to be in the offing.

As for the Jews, they had experienced a half-century of population growth thanks to earlier waves of immigration, to their still significant levels of fertility, and to low rates of defection. The early postwar period was a time, moreover, when Jews and Judaism were gaining a status and respectability unprecedented in American history. Symptomatically, the most important study in religious sociology in those years, Will Herberg's *Protestant—Catholic—Jew*, acknowledged an equal role for Judaism along with Protestantism and Catholicism in the "triple melting pot" of the great American experiment.

Today's religious and ethnic landscape offers a startling contrast. Protestants now constitute barely half of all Americans (52 percent), and the likelihood is of still further decline, particularly among the mainline denominations; according to a Gallup survey, roughly 40 percent of Americans now identify as evangelicals or born-again Christians. As the overall numbers of Protestants have fallen, the numbers of Catholics have slightly risen (to a little over 25 percent), owing largely not to natural increase but to immigration. Indeed, the greatest impact of the post-1965 wave of immigrants to our shores is to be found among Christian groups. Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese speakers are a major force today in both Protestant and Catholic churches. As the sociologist R. Stephen Warner has put it, these new immigrants "represent not the de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity."

And the Jews? If their numbers at mid-century greatly exceeded the combined populations of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, that is far from the case today. While the total population of the United States has increased from 160 million to over 280 million in the past 50 years, the absolute number of Jews has, at best, remained static. Even with the arrival of several hundred thousand Holocaust survivors after World War II, and more recently of Jews from the former Soviet Union, Iran, and Israel, low Jewish birthrates and the upward spiraling of intermarriage have resulted in a failure to increase. In proportional terms, the Jewish share of the overall U.S. population has declined from a mid-century

high of 3.7 percent to somewhere between 2 and 2.5 percent.

THOUGH POLITICAL and social strength is not dependent solely on population size or density, there is no blinking the significance of these waning figures, or of still other factors that could be cited—for example, the dispersal of the Jewish population from its previous concentration in the Boston-Washington corridor. As for the once eminent place of Judaism in the "triple melting pot," most works on American religion do still continue to include references to Jews—along with Sikhs, Hindus, and Zoroastrians—but at least one recent work on the "late-20th-century awakening," while offering chapters on Protestants, Catholics, and Buddhists, passes over the Jews in relative silence.

So far, there has been only limited discussion within the Jewish community as to how these altered patterns are affecting America's Jews, or as to how Jewish agencies should reposition themselves to forge links with groups that are growing in size and influence. For reasons that are readily apparent, the quandary in which the agencies find themselves is very deep. Take, for example, today's Hispanics, who make up the largest segment of Christian immigrants. Although politically liberal, Hispanics, in R. Stephen Warner's words, "tend to be morally conservative." How are Jews, who continue to be not only politically liberal but outspoken in their support of liberal social causes like abortion, gay rights, and ending the death penalty, to find common ground with their Hispanic neighbors? How, with their bias toward secularism or toward the more rationalistic forms of religious expression, will they forge links to the expanding numbers of Pentecostal Christians, or to adherents of African variants of Christianity, not to mention Santeria, voodoo, and other alien religious practices? How, especially in the light of Islamist anti-Semitism, are Jewish groups to respond to the growing political influence of Muslim populations in places like Michigan?

Although one or two community-relations agencies have consciously made overtures to leaders of Latino and Asian-American groups in order to explore matters of common interest, or to press the cause of Israel and other Jewish concerns, most remain in thrall to old allegiances and to the pull of inertia. The longer this state of affairs continues, as David A. Harris of the American Jewish Committee has correctly warned, the more Jews will run the risk of being "left in the dust one day, notwithstanding our remarkable success to date."

THE SUCCESS to which Harris refers was built upon a network of agencies established early in the last century to insure Jewish security and to fight for Jewish interests. Primary among these agencies were the so-called “big-three” defense organizations—the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and the American Jewish Congress. Until World War II, these groups understood their task to be one of protecting Jews from discrimination and ameliorating the suffering caused by persecution. On the international scene, they confronted anti-Semitic threats to Jewish populations abroad and sought to ease the plight of Jewish victims. In time, they and other American Jewish organizations came to regard the Zionist movement and, after 1948, the newly created state of Israel as vital instruments of self-defense.

Not surprisingly, these agencies limited their purview to matters that strictly affected Jews: prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and physical violence. Individual Jewish activists interested in fighting for the rights and liberties of others generally did so by joining or in some cases founding non-sectarian organizations like the NAACP or the Urban League. One historian has referred to this as a “bifurcated program of social action.”

During the postwar era, all this changed. First, the range of agencies expanded. Denominational arms, local community-relations councils, Zionist organizations, Holocaust museums, and other institutions now participated in the task of winning friends for the Jewish community through coalition-building, interfaith and intergroup dialogue, lobbying, and political action. With the expansion of the field, strategy also shifted, as Jewish security was now understood to be bound up with an ever-increasing set of policy issues. Thus, organizations across the spectrum lobbied for legislation banning housing and employment discrimination against any American, on the reasoning that such discrimination would eventually be directed at Jews. Led by the American Jewish Congress, Jewish defense organizations also litigated vigorously against any infringement upon the principle of the separation of church and state.

In time, Jewish organizations formulated “positions” on every conceivable matter of public interest, from abortion rights to stem-cell research, from foreign policy to civil rights, the environment, and health care. Although a few observers questioned the competence of these organizations to render judgments on matters far removed from the defense of Jewish security, and others wondered how thoughtfully or how democratically the judgments were

arrived at, there was hardly any debate about whether it was good for Jewish groups to be taking vocal stances on so wide a spectrum of issues, still less about whether the positions taken might not create as many foes as they would win friends.

In the immediate postwar decades, such questions, if asked at all, were brushed aside. Just as Jewish voters overwhelmingly favored candidates fielded by the Democratic party, Jewish organizations instinctively made common cause with groups within the New Deal coalition—liberal Protestants and Catholics, labor unions, other minorities (especially black Americans), and secular liberal organizations. This was understandable enough. Evangelical Protestants were, at the time, quiescent; the Republican party was an alien entity, still tainted by isolationism; corporate America excluded Jews from major positions; rural populations were at a far remove; and insofar as anti-Semitism was noticeable, it emanated from conservative, nationalist quarters, the traditional locus of anti-Jewish animus in the modern era.

In short, American Jews had forged a consensus concerning the twin pillars of their public agenda—namely, as the historian Arthur Goren has described it, “assuring Israel’s security and striving for a liberal America.” Both aims were expressed in universal terms: democratic Israel deserved support because it embodied the best values of liberal-democratic America, and the values of liberal-democratic America were the best antidote to all forms of social prejudice, anti-Semitism among them.

IT WAS only in the late 1960’s that strains began to develop in the postwar consensus forged by Jewish groups. The first shock came during and right after the Six-Day war of 1967, when elements of the secular Left and liberal Christians who had been traditional partners-in-dialogue with the Jewish community openly castigated Israel for having defended itself against the Arab armies bent on its annihilation. In one characteristic statement, Henry P. Van Dusen, the president of the Union Theological Seminary, surrealistically described Israel’s actions as “the most violent, ruthless (and successful) aggression since Hitler’s blitzkrieg.” In a foreshadowing of things to come, many a Jewish participant in interfaith cooperation began to feel, in the words of Samuel Sandmel, a professor at Hebrew Union College, “completely abandoned by precisely those Christians with whom [American Jews] had so much affirmative cooperation.”

Almost simultaneously, the anti-white and, specifically, anti-Jewish fusillades of the Black Power movement heightened tensions between Jews and

their erstwhile allies in the civil-rights community, a relationship that would be further tested in the coming decades by disagreements over affirmative action. In the early 1970's, the newly skittish defense posture of the Democratic party evoked worry about the ability of a weakened and inward-looking United States to arm and protect Israel. Taking the measures of those and other seismic changes within American liberalism, some observers, in COMMENTARY and elsewhere, began to question the steadfastly liberal orientation of the organized Jewish community. So did Orthodox groups. For the most part, however, the major Jewish agencies stayed the course that had been set at mid-century. For the most part, they still do.

THE WORLD, however, has moved on. Especially during the last few years, shock after shock has been delivered to yesterday's assumptions about friends and foes. If, for example, American Jews have historically placed their faith in the civilizing influence of higher education, sending their children in disproportionate numbers to college and universities in the expectation of finding there a bastion of liberal tolerance, since 2000 these putative oases have erupted in anti-Israel demonstrations that in some cases have crossed the line into open anti-Semitism. To the further consternation of many Jews, the hue and cry against Israel and its supporters has been joined by the established liberal media, as well as by the more specialized journals of the educated classes. In this country, a new low in the campaign to delegitimize Israel was reached when the *New York Review of Books*, the house organ of the highbrow Left, published an article arguing for the dismantling of the world's only Jewish state.

If, on the issue of Israel, Jewish groups have had a hard time coping with their abandonment by allies (real or imagined) on the Left, they have had perhaps an even harder struggle making sense of the warm support for Israel shown by the Christian Right. Evangelicals raise money for Israel, lobby for congressional support of Israel, and at the height of the Palestinian *intifada* did not shy away from visiting the Jewish state even as American Jews kept away in droves. They have been no less forthright in their condemnation of the anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric emanating from the Muslim world and from advanced sectors of Western society. Who would have imagined, as the Israeli writer Hillel Halkin has paraphrased the Jewish reaction, that "after 1,500 years of persecution by Christianity, our biggest allies are now

devout Christians—and not only devout Christians but often the most unlettered, unworldly, and unsophisticated of the devout, people with whom we seem to have absolutely nothing in common”?

SOME JEWISH groups have begun, belatedly, to adjust to these developments. Thus, at its most recent convention, the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, an umbrella for Jewish community-relations organizations and once an unabashedly liberal agency, voted to expand cooperation with evangelical Christians on a wide range of mutual concerns. But others, unable to take yes for an answer, have insisted on maintaining their distance from the Christian Right, supposedly out of distrust of its millenarian motives (some evangelicals view Israel as a divine instrument in the unfolding of the Second Coming).

The apprehensions of the liberal organizations were deepened last spring by the appearance of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, a hugely successful movie that, echoing passion plays of yore, revived the most pernicious of medieval canards: the charge that “the Jews,” then and for all time, were Christ-killers. But whether the apprehensions of the agencies were justified is another question.

Long before it opened, the film drew an agitated response from a number of official Jewish spokesmen who predicted that it would assuredly trigger a wave of Christian anti-Semitism. (For Michael Lerner of the leftist magazine *Tikkun*, the film's very existence proved the scurrility of any Jewish organization thinking to forge ties with the Christian Right; instead, he averred heatedly, Jews needed to “get out of bed with the reactionaries” and end their “pact with the devil.”) But no such apocalyptic scenario developed. So far, Christian feelings both toward Israel and toward contemporary American Jews appear unchanged.

In any event, lost in the uproar over the Gibson movie was a development of potentially great significance to Jews—namely, the emerging ideological alliance it exposed *within* American Christianity. Made by a self-proclaimed Catholic traditionalist, the movie was suffused with Catholic themes and imagery. Nevertheless, evangelical churches booked theaters and purchased blocks of tickets, and legions of the evangelical faithful made up an exceptionally large and ardent element in the film's audience. Their embrace of Gibson's vision gave public expression to a growing convergence between evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics that is reconfiguring the American reli-

gious landscape. Although they do not see eye to eye on all political matters, these two huge communities are allies in the culture wars—i.e., on such issues as abortion, gay rights, pornography, education, and the rest. These, of course, are precisely the issues on which much of the organized Jewish community stands on the other side.

The flap over the Gibson movie also illuminated some of the ongoing pitfalls of Jewish-Christian “dialogue.” Notwithstanding the courageous efforts of four leading Roman Catholic (and two Jewish) scholars to criticize the movie in a constructive way before its release, and notwithstanding the reservations about it that were expressed by many Catholic and Protestant academics, the Catholic Bishops’ Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, a major body in interfaith work, failed to stand by its own guidelines for evaluating dramatizations of the passion; in the case of Gibson’s movie, much to the dismay of Jews professionally active in interfaith dialogue, the bishops acted as if those guidelines had never been drafted.

Nor was the controversy over Gibson’s movie the only sign of continuing trouble on the interfaith front. Blindsiding its longtime liberal allies in the Jewish community, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA recently instructed its investment managers to eschew the stocks and bonds of corporations doing business in Israel. In its press release, the church linked its divestment program to the successful campaign of the 1970’s and 80’s to end apartheid in South Africa—thus suggesting that Israel, too, is a racist state. Adding insult to injury, the Presbyterians also voted to continue funding a messianic church that targets Jews for conversion.

Presbyterians are not enemies of the Jews, or even of Israel. Since the vote, many clergy and lay people have expressed shame at the actions taken in their name. But, as in the controversy over Mel Gibson’s movie, the general lesson for Jewish groups is unmistakable: the partners and allies on whom they have long relied have their own agendas and their own interests, and Jewish concerns are neither necessarily paramount among them nor, in cases of conflict, of special weight.

OVER THE past half-century, no more fixed principle has taken root in the Jewish mind than the necessity for an impermeable wall of separation between church and state. In the words of one veteran insider, that wall is essential “not only to religious freedom but to the creative and distinctive survival of diverse religious groups, such as the Jewish community.”

As it happens, quite a few exceptions have been made to the principle of separation over the centuries, and neither the republic nor the Jewish community has been any the worse for them. But this has not stopped Jewish groups in the postwar era from litigating against even the slightest fissure in the wall, fearful that otherwise the entire structure would collapse. By the end of the 20th century, the separationist faith had so suffused the organized community that the head of the Washington office of the National Council of Jewish Women, declaring her opposition to any form of state aid to religious schools, could say without a hint of self-reflection that “We can’t put a chink in the wall just because [doing so] will benefit Jewish children.”

Perhaps ironically, what is now testing the separationist faith of Jewish groups is the terrorist war against America. Institutions around the country, including religious ones, are investing huge sums to improve security at their buildings by adding barriers, guards, surveillance cameras, and the like. The principal of an all-day Jewish religious school recently estimated that his annual security costs exceed \$1,000 per pupil. The question on the table is: ought religious institutions obtain a share of federal and state funds set aside for homeland security?

Most Jewish organizations have supported legislation, now before Congress, that would channel government money directly to contractors rather than to religious institutions themselves, thus preserving the spirit as well as the letter of the First Amendment. But not all the major groups are satisfied; among the vocal dissenters are the ADL and the Religious Action Center of the Reform movement, the largest of the Jewish denominations. The latter group in particular has opposed the bill on the grounds that it indirectly allows for “government-funded capital improvement of houses of worship, and we think that is a bad idea.”

This is an emblematic instance of the otherworldly quality that continues to affect the work of those Jewish community-relations organizations that remain committed to fighting yesterday’s wars whatever the consequences. Synagogues and other Jewish institutions around the globe have already been targeted by terrorists, at a terrible cost in human life. More attacks are hardly inconceivable. In what sense is the physical safety of real people—Jews and others who happen to be in the vicinity—less important to Jews than an intractable belief in the separationist faith? France separated church and state nearly a century ago. That did nothing to protect the Jews of France from the Vichy government, any more than it has shielded young French

Jewish children from Arab hooligans today. How long can American Jewish organizations continue to place their obsession with an impermeable wall of separation above the physical security of the Jews for whom they claim to speak?

IN A time of war, such questions are likely only to multiply. I have not even touched, for instance, on the issue of immigration. Jewish organizations have long been opposed to any restrictions on entry to this country, a position crying out for reassessment in light of the terrorist threat and the growth of the Arab population. Nor have I addressed the delicate question of *how* the organized community should argue for and promote its agenda in today's changed circumstances. That is, aside from properly defining its mission, what should its tactics be?

A final word may be in order on that point. Much of the rhetoric and many of the approaches devised by community-relations agencies for dealing with matters of Jewish interest were formulated in the immediate post-Holocaust years. Indeed, when it comes to today's anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and responses to the Holocaust, continue to serve as the template for understanding how to react. But some of the so-called "lessons" derived from the Holocaust have been distinctly unhelpful.

One such lesson concerns the allegedly quietistic posture adopted by American Jewish groups during the Holocaust years, a posture that in retrospect is said to have issued in even greater harm being done to European Jews. Whatever the historical accuracy of the charge, the lesson drawn from it is that today's Jewish leaders have a positive duty to go loud and public with their every concern.

The controversy over *The Passion* demonstrated how flawed such thinking can be. The spectacle of Jewish spokesmen vociferously inveighing against Mel Gibson—in the weeks surrounding the movie's release, Jewish critics filled the airwaves, especially on cable television, explaining how, in the light of modern biblical scholarship, Gibson and his sup-

porters completely misunderstood or misread the New Testament—accomplished little other than to provide free publicity for his movie. Not only would a modulated approach have proved more effective, it would have better tested the strength of the coalitions formed by Jewish organizations with their Christian counterparts. The critical question posed by *The Passion*, after all, was not what Jews thought of the movie, but what believing Christians would make of Gibson's heterodox rendering of a theme so central to their own religion. The attack on Gibson, by allowing him to portray himself as another martyr to Jewish persecution, effectively foreclosed the possibility of finding out the answer,

This same lecturing mode has extended into active meddling in the affairs of other religious groups. Thus, the *Forward*, the largest-circulation national Jewish newspaper, editorialized recently against Catholic bishops who had threatened to withhold communion from Catholic politicians favoring current abortion rights. Although the bishops did not *require* priests to withhold communion, that did not deter the *Forward* from hectoring Catholic leaders about what ought to be important to them and what fidelity to their own faith demanded of them. One can imagine the reaction were the Catholic press to undertake to instruct rabbis on the proper interpretation of Jewish law, and concerning a matter having little or no impact on Catholics.

Here again, in microcosm, is the confusion besetting the organized American Jewish community. Before the heady days when Jewish defense meant building a full-blown "domestic agenda," Jewish agencies focused, sharply, on the protection of Jewish lives, rights, and property. In the quieter decades of the late 20th century, mandates and ambitions began expanding as Jewish organizations embraced the causes of non-sectarian groups, often with greater fervor than those groups themselves and sometimes to the detriment of palpable Jewish interests. Now, as threats to Jewish security have multiplied, the time for business as usual has long passed, and the time to reconsider is urgently at hand.

Our Stake in Taiwan

Arthur Waldron

FEW DIPLOMATIC achievements in history have garnered such universal praise as the rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) that was completed in the 1970's during the presidencies of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. After a decades-long period of non-recognition following the end of World War II and the Communist victory in China, diplomatic communication was finally established between Washington and Beijing, and, with it, the balance of power in the cold war shifted dramatically against the Soviet Union. By the mid-1980's, with Mao Zedong dead and China opening itself to both foreign visitors and foreign investment and trade, hopes began to blossom for the day when the two countries might even be able to exercise the sort of shared, benign leadership of Asia that had been the dream of countless Americans and Chinese since as far back as Sun Yat-sen early in the last century.

Throughout the first half of that century, the U.S. and China had been friends. Indeed, even after the ousting of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government by Mao's Commu-

nists in 1949, administration after administration had sought to construct some sort of relationship with Beijing. The fault lay with the Chinese, bent on building a new world order in which the U.S. would have no part. Even John F. Kennedy's charm and ingenuity failed to break through. As Dean Rusk, JFK's Secretary of State, would put it, "they just kept hanging up the phone." Not until the greater menace posed by the Soviet Union brought the two sides together did it prove possible to set aside the main obstacle that, ostensibly, had prevented consummation.

That obstacle was Taiwan, or Formosa as it was then often called: an island approximately the size of the Netherlands that lies about a hundred miles off China's coast. Taiwan was an obstacle because Chiang Kai-shek, who had ruled all of China from 1927 until his defeat in the civil war of 1945-49, had succeeded in continuing his government there, arriving in December 1949.

For reasons of history, the Taiwan to which Chiang repaired had developed in a manner very distinct from China. Physically beautiful but challenging, the island was dominated by high mountains and impassable jungle, with a vast assortment of poisonous snakes and few arable areas. Its earliest inhabitants had not been Chinese at all, but were related instead to the Filipinos and Malays. Nevertheless, it had long appealed to émigrés from China: from the 16th century on, these were

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mostly single males speaking the southern Fujian dialect who married local women of the original stock, speakers of the Austronesian languages then current from Taiwan and the Philippines to Hawaii, New Zealand, and Madagascar. Today, the DNA of Taiwanese descended from these first migrants falls halfway between that of Filipinos and Chinese from Fujian province, just across the Strait.

The political history of the island was likewise distinct. It was the Portuguese who gave it the name "Formosa," although for a brief period in the mid-17th century it was also controlled by the Dutch. In 1644, numerous loyalists of the Chinese Ming dynasty, fleeing the non-Chinese Manchus, made their way to Taiwan where they ousted the Dutch and continued a successful resistance until 1687, when terms were struck with the Manchu Qing. The Qing, in turn, kept a limited presence on the island, first placing it under the provincial authority of Fujian and then making it a discrete province of their empire in 1885.

But then in 1895 the Manchus, having been utterly defeated by Japan, turned over the island without any compunctions. Under Japanese rule, the Taiwanese did reasonably well; Japanese is still the easiest language for the oldest generation of today's Taiwanese to speak. Taiwanese conscripts served in the Japanese army in World War II.

On the eve of Japan's defeat in 1945, few people thought of Taiwan as what today's Chinese constitution explicitly claims it to be—namely, a province of the People's Republic. It had Chinese characteristics, to be sure, but its basic character was its own. Although Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed in 1943 that the island should be returned to China, the forces sent by Chiang in 1945 to subdue the place so alienated the locals that riots broke out in early 1947 and had to be put down by fresh troops; several tens of thousands of Taiwanese are thought to have been murdered.

Everything changed when Chiang arrived two years later with about two million of his followers, to continue there the government of the Republic of China just as Ming loyalists had done 300 years earlier. Until his death in 1975, Taiwan experienced autocratic (but not totalitarian) government, accompanied by regular pronouncements to the effect that the city of Taipei was China's true capital and that Chiang's party would soon liberate the mainland from the Communists. Mandarin became the obligatory language. In 1953, with U.S.-China relations thoroughly poisoned by the Korean war, Washington concluded a military alliance with

Chiang's "Republic of China" and helped it to push back a series of challenges from Mao. Radical economic reforms begun in the late 1950's sparked double-digit economic growth. Today, though ranked 47th in the world in population, Taiwan is the world's fourteenth largest exporter and sixteenth largest importer, and holds the world's third largest foreign-exchange reserves.

WHEN THE U.S. undertook its historic "opening" to mainland China in the 1970's, Presidents Nixon and Ford temporarily managed the Taiwan problem by keeping its ambassador "to" China in Taipei while dispatching another diplomat to serve as ambassador "in" China (where he presided over a "liaison office"). It was not a neat arrangement, but it was dictated by a prudent concern for the security of Taiwan, by then a longtime U.S. ally and a far freer place than the PRC. But in 1979, four years after Chiang's death and three years after Mao's, Jimmy Carter, at the urging of close advisers, abruptly broke all official relations, diplomatic and military, with the island. The news was conveyed in the small hours, without warning, by a phone call that woke the president, Chiang Ching-kuo, son of the late Generalissimo.

It was Carter's ill-considered action that created the unstable situation that has lasted until today. Leaping boldly into uncharted territory—when had any country, except in case of war, utterly severed its official ties with another, in this case a close friend?—the Carter White House imagined it was cutting the Gordian knot of American foreign policy in East Asia. The expectation was that the autocratic government in Taipei would have no alternative but to come to terms with China and would thus disappear as a festering issue in international politics. Many of Carter's advisers anticipated an interval of no more than four to five years before the island's aging leaders, reaching over the heads of their disenfranchised people, would accept Premier Deng Xiaoping's offer of "one country, two systems." Or, as Carter's communiqué put it blandly: "The United States expects that the Taiwan issue will be settled peacefully by the Chinese people themselves."

In the event, not only did this plan fail to be realized but the attempt to execute it created false expectations and enduring mistrust among all three players. In 1982, while President Reagan was still finding his feet on China, Deng Xiaoping held out the prospect of Taiwan's joining China as a completely autonomous territory,

while also demanding that Washington cease all arms sales to the island. The ensuing negotiations produced another deeply unsatisfactory communiqué in which Beijing assured everyone concerned that its “basic approach” to Taiwan was peaceful and the United States, for its part, promised gradually to reduce arms sales.

The stars were now aligned for Taiwan to play its assigned role. But it declined the part. Deng Xiaoping’s ever-so-polite letter to Chiang Ching-kuo went unanswered. Instead, Chiang, who had studied in the USSR and had begun his career as chief of Taiwan’s secret police, set out on a course that no one in the U.S. had ever considered: democratization. A radically oppositionist Democratic Progressive party was allowed to form in 1987, which also turned out to be the penultimate year of the younger Chiang’s life. Under his hand-picked successor, Lee Teng-hui, all political prisoners were released, exiles began to return, the press was liberated, martial law was abolished—and the government, entirely reconstituted, was made legitimate by elections for both the presidency and the parliament.

AS THE world continued to lecture Taiwan that its only choice was to talk and talk until agreement was reached on its absorption into China, public sentiment on the island began to shift in the other direction. The old “Chinese” self-identification—based in part on cultural tradition, enforced by the Nationalist regime, and seconded by the United States as long as it had an embassy in Taipei—faded. More and more citizens declared themselves “Taiwanese” and began demanding the same rights as any other people—to a state, to independence, to self-government, and all the rest.

China, in the meantime, was still waiting impatiently for its *quid pro quo*. As Beijing read things, Washington had promised to do what was necessary to force Taipei to come to terms. Over the succeeding years, tensions and contradictions grew as the PRC assiduously stamped every vestige of the “Republic of China” out of official international relations—Taiwan was barred not only from the United Nations but from the World Health Organization—while the United States failed to help it either to find some new and acceptable place in the world or to prepare itself realistically for the possibility of Beijing-initiated violence.

And violence did become increasingly possible. Well aware that Taiwan’s people would never freely vote for “peaceful unification,” China’s president Jiang Zemin observed adroitly in 1995

that “if we abandon the threat of force against Taiwan, then it is impossible that peaceful unification will be achieved.” A vast program of military modernization and expansion, begun in 1989 right after the crushing of pro-democracy forces in Tiananmen Square, included the deployment of nearly 500 ballistic missiles directly across from the island and the brandishing of supersonic anti-ship missiles with the ability to sink American aircraft carriers. In recent years, the Chinese military has conducted large-scale amphibious landing exercises on Dongshan, an off-shore Chinese island not dissimilar to Taiwan. In the bristling words of Premier Wen Jiabao, China is ready to “pay any price to safeguard the unity of the motherland.”

Such threats, and actions, have been a great headache to Washington. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, passed overwhelmingly by a Congress angry with Carter for abandoning an ally, all but committed us to come to Taiwan’s aid in case of conflict, to supply the island with necessary defensive weapons, and to maintain our own capacity to intervene in its defense. As long as China was focused mostly on internal economic development, these words seemed to matter little. Today, with the American and Chinese sides increasingly polarized, and with the vivid example of China’s ham-fisted interventions to keep control of Hong Kong, they matter a great deal.

Like the German naval buildup of the late 19th century that contributed so much to the miscalculations leading to World War I, Chinese military expansion has put all of Asia on edge. The threat is not only to Taiwan, but Taiwan is increasingly the pivot. The strategic reason is obvious: the island lies athwart the most important East Asian sea lanes linking Japan, South Korea, and coastal China to the Middle East, source of the petroleum that drives their economies. The same lanes connect European Russia by sea to its strategically vital Pacific coast, and connect India, which maintains a major presence at the western end of the Straits of Malacca, to East and Southeast Asia. To an ambitious power, they offer a route into the Indian Ocean and beyond.

TODAY’S TAIWAN has no interest in dominating, let alone harming, any of its neighbors; it presides benignly over this crucial maritime route. But what would happen if Taiwan became an operational base for the Chinese military, as Hong Kong has now effectively become? This is a question that few have cared, or dared, to think about realistically.

In May of this year, Singapore's prime minister, Goh Chok-tong, ridiculed the idea of Taiwanese independence, noting that no Asian state supported it and warning Taipei not to cross any "red lines" that might make war with China inevitable. But what would Singapore's own security look like if the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were based in Taiwan? And, a *fortiori*, what about Japan? Although, like the U.S., Japan has never recognized Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan, it has played the same game of make-believe as nearly everyone else and has severed relations with the island. How would Japan, the world's third largest importer of petroleum, view a situation in which the PLA could easily cut *its* energy supplies?

The fact is that the unification of Taiwan and China would severely menace the national-security interests of every Asian state, including especially our democratic friends and allies. Which means that not only justice and international legality but also their, and our, security requires that Taiwan *not* fall under Chinese control.

Yet we ourselves still say we want unification. Our disinclination to reconsider what our interests and those of our allies require was made painfully clear during the month-long run-up to Taiwan's presidential election this past May. The election itself was won by the incumbent, Chen Shuibian of the Democratic Progressive party, who has stressed Taiwan's uniqueness and denied that it is part of China. His opponent was Lien Chan, a former vice president and a stalwart of the Kuomintang or Nationalist party that ruled Taiwan without interruption until Chen's first victory four years ago.

Washington, under pressure from Beijing, made little secret of whom it supported. Lien was seen as the candidate who might lead Taiwan into the Chinese fold, while Chen was portrayed as a headstrong troublemaker whose statements about the identity and aspirations of the people of Taiwan threatened to push Beijing into taking military action and thus drag the United States into war. With China's premier standing beside him, President Bush delivered a vague but unmistakable warning to Chen not to "provoke" Beijing. Meanwhile, in Taipei, our official representative was privately telling visitors that, should Chen win, we might expect war between China and Taiwan within the year.

Chen won—threats have a tendency to backfire—with a majority of just over 50 percent of the vote. The new president's inaugural address

succeeded in pleasing Washington by means of a clear expression of goodwill toward China and an offer to resume unconditional talks (an offer that Beijing promptly dismissed as "insincere"). But the election also revealed how much Taiwan has changed in its nearly two decades of democracy. Polls show that the population, which used to consider itself "Chinese," now regards itself as either "Taiwanese" or "Taiwanese and Chinese." Even in the Kuomintang, the old leaders of Chinese background are being replaced by a younger generation born and raised in Taiwan; their interests and their sense of identity differ little from those of the leadership of the Democratic Progressive party. A consensus has formed that, however the future develops, Taiwan must retain complete control of its own affairs.

Thus, despite the fact that it is standard in Beijing and quite fashionable in Washington to blame cross-strait tensions on President Chen, this misses the point: Chen's views reflect those of the Taiwanese people who elected him. He cannot instruct them to change their minds, nor can he impose any sort of settlement without their approval. Union with China would be possible only if approved by a referendum of all Taiwanese, and every attempt to browbeat them has only strengthened their determination to become masters in their own land. What has happened in Taiwan since the end of the dictatorship is a classic example of how nationalism develops. China and the world's shunning of the Taiwanese has only accelerated and intensified the process.

TO BE fair, Washington is already dealing rather effectively with one horn of the dilemma created by these deeply rooted developments: namely, the problem of maintaining Taiwan's security. Beijing's strategy has long been to attempt to get at Taiwan through Washington—that is, to induce us, by a combination of threats and promises, to abandon our support for the island and thus prepare it for delivery to the PRC.

So far, despite Beijing's success at politicizing what should be purely military decisions, this has not worked. Indeed, in a speech last April, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly subtly redefined the American position, asserting that America's interest lay in maintaining the peaceful status quo as we defined it, and that neither China nor Taiwan should attempt to change it unilaterally. This was a departure from our standard rhetoric invoking the goal of unification.

Concurrently, the Bush administration has done much to supply needed weapons and training to Taiwan's long-isolated military, as well as to create a strong U.S. strike force at Guam, about a thousand miles away, capable of intervening at very short notice.

The other horn of the dilemma, however, remains a puzzle to all concerned. Even assuming the will to do so, how would we go about restoring the sort of appropriate and full diplomatic relations with Taiwan that are the norm with any other country? The trouble here is that after planning for and expecting Taiwan's demise, we have given away nearly every negotiating card we might once have held—UN membership, for example, which lost by a handful of votes and could have been won with real American backing.

When Henry Kissinger made his first visit to China in 1971, he affirmed that the United States did not seek "two Chinas; one China, one Taiwan; or an independent Taiwan"—which seemed to close all doors save that of union with China. True, Kissinger was also careful to maintain the longstanding American position that the question of Taiwan's sovereignty "remained to be determined." This ambiguity was incorporated in the 1972 Shanghai communiqué and in every official document ever since. Nevertheless, our "one-China policy," which allows us to recognize only one Chinese regime at a time, has imposed crippling restrictions on our diplomacy. (It should be noted that under Chiang Kai-shek, Taipei maintained that it was the legitimate government of China, a claim that has long since been abandoned.)

Even though Taiwan is probably one of our ten most important foreign postings, we and they exchange "representatives," not "ambassadors." The Taiwanese have no embassy in Washington, and no diplomatic status; they cannot display their flag, or enter official U.S. premises. Staffs are far too small to handle real business. Although the Bush administration has been far more hospitable than its predecessors to Taiwan's elected leadership, permitting President Chen a "transit visit" through New York that featured a large public tribute at the Waldorf Astoria, the fact remains that, while the president of Mali can visit Washington and be feted at the White House, the president of Taiwan cannot. Taiwanese diplomats sardonically call our capital the *zijincheng*, the "forbidden city."

Diplomacy serves a purpose. If we are unhappy with certain assertions by our ally Chen Shuibian, president of one of the most important states in East Asia, might it not make sense to give him a dinner at the White House, followed by a visit to the family

quarters and then the necessary talk? But we forbid ourselves such powerful tools, instead voicing our complaints indirectly, through intermediaries, over great distances. Not even at the height of the cold war did we treat the leadership of our enemies with such self-defeating disrespect as we treat the leadership of our Taiwanese friends.

WHAT THEN should we do? Many in Washington still instinctively blame Taiwan and Chen for any tensions with China, arguing in the standard phrase that "Taiwan must be put in a box." But they are wrong, both in their facts and in their conclusions.

The first home truth that must be absorbed is that "peaceful reunification" is not going to happen. It is a fantasy to imagine that the same PRC that bloodily crushed its own democracy movement in 1989 and is now seeking to discard the promises it made to Hong Kong can somehow peacefully convince the people of Taiwan to join it. Were China itself to become democratic and free, the danger of war in the Strait would be dissipated, and a political arrangement, including possibly some sort of affiliation or federation, could be reached through negotiation. But even with a democratic China, it is highly probable that Taiwan would reject the idea of unification, preferring instead to remain a good neighbor.

But it is also a fantasy—and this is the second home truth—to imagine that the PRC has a viable military option for bringing the people of Taiwan to heel. The United States has insisted from the start that any change must be peaceful, and we are prepared to defend Taiwan if necessary. Moreover, the current Beijing leadership may underestimate the strength of the Taiwanese themselves. American experts have developed plausible scenarios in which an attempted Chinese amphibious assault is repelled in a rout, using relatively simple capabilities that Taiwan either already possesses or is acquiring. At least one high Chinese military official seems to agree: Liu Yazhou, the one PRC general who has actually visited Taiwan. In an essay widely circulated on the Internet in China, General Liu has warned that, while invincible on land, the PLA has never won a battle at sea. He has also offered the prudent observation that "in a future war against Taiwan, given its geostrategic significance to the U.S., it would be the whole Western world defending Taiwan."

For China, the obvious and easy way to avoid the kind of war of which Liu warns would be to reach a genuine negotiated settlement that would finally confer upon Taiwan the international status it deserves. Why, then, has no one in Beijing thus far

shown any interest in this option? The reason has to do not with us or the Taiwanese. Nor is it a symptom of some deep Chinese obsession with sovereignty, as some have argued. Mongolia, occupying 600,000 very strategic square miles, joined the Qing empire even before China itself did, and long before Taiwan, and remained part of that empire to the end; today its independence is recognized by Beijing, and is certainly no sticking point in our diplomatic relations.

Although leaders in Beijing are clearly unsettled by the development of democracy and a new sense of identity in Taiwan, their obsession with the island has little to do with external factors and far more to do with the tense political situation in China itself. Ever since the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, the problem for China has been the illegitimacy of its *own* government. That murderous incident and its legacy are the unspoken subtext of much political activity in today's PRC.

The order to sack Beijing in 1989 came from an irregularly convened conclave of Communist-party elders. The same group placed the country's legal leader, Zhao Ziyang, under house arrest (where he remains) and, in complete violation not only of the Chinese constitution but also of the party's own rules, named a new leadership, first Jiang Zemin and then Hu Jintao. The latter is now in theory China's president, but the former has been unwilling to give up his power. Increasing the tension over Taiwan serves Jiang's interest, reinforcing the argument that he must remain chairman of the central military commission and that his own protégé, Zeng Qinghong, would be a fitting replacement for President Hu Jintao. Under these circumstances, both Hu and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao are compelled to take at least as hard a line.

SO LONG as China remains a dictatorship, and so long as it remains engaged in a threatening military buildup—Jiang Zemin has adopted dangerously provocative policies not only toward Taiwan but toward Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, the Koreas, and others—the danger will exist that it may start a war in East Asia. The way to prevent this is by deterrence. The United States cannot deter China alone, nor should it. But an alliance of democratic states, politically and militarily strong, could do so—while also helping to provide the time and perhaps the incentive for China to change internally.

Our goal should be gradually to discard our confused 30-year-old policy and cultivate a sub-

stantial entente of the democratic states in East Asia. This would involve adjusting our existing treaties with, for example, Japan and South Korea, making them genuinely equal partners. It would also involve regular multilateral meetings and concrete steps to ensure some degree of diplomatic coordination, secure communications, and the interoperability of weapons systems in case of war. In and around Taiwan itself, we should be increasing our military and political presence. Above all, we should be working actively to help the island find an appropriate and functional place in the world.

Would this, as some warn, increase tensions all the more, risk destroying our relationship with China, or so alarm Beijing that it would have “no choice” but to start a suicidal war? Not in the least. Although the failure of Taiwan to disappear is clearly an irritant to the Chinese, the basic source of tension in the Taiwan Strait is, to repeat, internal Chinese political rivalry. As for our relationship with Beijing, it centers mostly on trade, and the terms are by no means favorable to the United States or to the free countries whose workers cannot compete effectively with China's “disciplined” labor force. War would close the overseas markets upon which China's economy depends. Finally, to initiate any sort of offensive action would be militarily perilous for China, as some Chinese leaders like General Liu understand. The alternatives are much more attractive, and could be made to seem even more so by forthright and effective diplomacy. Why, after all, should China not strike a deal and, instead of risking general war, permit itself to get on with the business of raising its own living standards?

Ultimately, the task of defending Taiwan is up to the people of Taiwan and their government. They are the ones who must undertake the initiatives and allocate the funds necessary to develop the offensive and defensive capabilities they require. But the United States clearly has a role to play, and work to do. A fragile peace and an increasing prosperity have existed across the Taiwan Strait for more than 50 years. Taiwan's successful democratization is, moreover, a powerful example to the rest of Asia, China not least. All of these achievements will be jeopardized if the current obsolete framework governing our East Asian relations is not reconstructed from first principles, and soon.

Chomsky's Universe

Arch Puddington

ON SEPTEMBER 19, 2001, eight days after the terror attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center, damaged the Pentagon, and killed over 3,000 people, Noam Chomsky was asked to assess the historical impact of 9/11 by an Italian newspaper. In posing this question, the journalist was aware of Chomsky's reputation as an extreme critic of America's foreign policy, its free-market economics, and its political system. Even on the Left, where anti-Americanism stands as the reigning ideology, Chomsky is unique for the single-mindedness of his vision. Over four decades, he has forged a consistent record of blaming the United States for the entire panoply of the world's problems: war, famine, genocide, poverty, even infectious disease. He also popularized the notion, now widely accepted on the Left, that the United States is itself the world's number-one "terror state."

Chomsky did not disappoint his interviewer. The fact that the United States had just come under deadly attack and faced the possibility of further and potentially deadlier aggression did not inspire reassessment or even moderation. He declared, in effect, that America had gotten what it deserved.

The heart of the matter, Chomsky explained, was not radical Islam's hatred of America, the West, or democracy, or the danger Islamic extremists posed to

their own societies, but rather America's violent behavior toward the rest of the world:

During the past several hundred years the U.S. annihilated the indigenous population (millions of people), conquered half of Mexico (in fact, the territories of indigenous people, but that is another matter), intervened violently in the surrounding region, conquered Hawaii and the Philippines (killing hundreds of Filipinos), and, in the past half-century particularly, extended its resort to force throughout much of the world. The number of victims is colossal.

The only novelty this time, Chomsky concluded, was that "the guns have been directed the other way."

As for the consequences of 9/11, Chomsky's main concern was not for the American people, American interests, or even the future victims of radical Islam in the Middle East and elsewhere, but for the Left. The event was "certainly a setback for the worldwide protests against corporate globalization," he commented, referring to a campaign in which he has played a leading role as intellectual guru. He also deplored the impact on the Palestinian Arabs, who would suffer from American neglect as Washington turned its attention to the war on terror. And even though the Bush administration was still in the process of formulating a strategy to deter future terrorist aggression, Chomsky confidently predicted that the government's response would "accelerate the agenda of militarization, regimentation, reversal of

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social-democratic programs, transfer of wealth to narrow sectors, and undermining democracy in any meaningful form.”

Nor was that all. In addition to obliterating civil liberties and enriching the wealthy at the expense of the poor, the Bush administration, Chomsky asserted, was preparing to slaughter millions of defenseless Afghans in a war to dislodge al Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. In the weeks leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan, Chomsky repeatedly spoke of an impending mass killing, insinuating that this was to be done as a deliberate act of policy. As he put it in a speech delivered in India on November 6:

Looks like what is happening is some sort of silent genocide. . . . What will happen, we don't know, but plans are being made and programs implemented on the assumption that they may lead to the death of several million people in the next few months, very casually, with no comment, no particular thought about it, that's just kind of normal here and in a good part of Europe.

AMERICA AS the world's greatest terror state; American leaders as the sworn enemies of freedom; the United States as the perpetrator of genocide, “very casually, with no comment”—here in a nutshell is Chomsky's message. It has been a remarkably consistent one, from the time in the mid-1960's when he first came upon the scene as an opponent of the Vietnam war until the present day. But now it is a message with a growing audience.

Even before 9/11, Chomsky was regarded as the most influential critic of American foreign policy on the radical Left. His recent writings, however, have attained best-seller status. *9/11*, a pamphlet-sized book of responses to questions from foreign journalists, sold over 300,000 copies in 23 languages. According to one survey, Chomsky is the most cited living author, and the eighth most cited of all time (just behind Freud). His speeches draw packed houses. At the World Social Forum, an annual gathering of the anti-globalist movement, he is a featured personality. The current generation of young leftists treat Chomsky as a celebrity, and pay him the kind of homage normally reserved for rock stars or cult icons. He is the subject of several reverential documentary films, which depict him as an isolated voice of truth against a corrupt and warmongering establishment, and he has even inspired a one-man theater work, *The Loneliness of Noam Chomsky*.

Chomsky's enhanced influence is reflected in the respect he now commands in the mainstream Amer-

ican press. Formerly ignored or treated as something of a fringe figure, he is sought out these days by major newspapers and is occasionally asked to write op-eds on the war on terror. His most recent book, *Hegemony or Survival*, was deferentially reviewed in the daily press and in journals of opinion, and he has been the subject of lengthy profiles in the *Washington Post* and the *New Yorker*.

There has thus emerged what can only be called a Chomsky mystique. To his admirers, he is more than a mere critic of American policy; by dint of a penetrating intellect and a dedication to honest scholarship, Chomsky, it is said, has been able to grasp truths about the United States that elude other radical analysts, not to mention those of more conventional mentality. The mystique is reinforced by Chomsky's reputation for ideological independence. As he frequently insists, he is not encumbered by the Marxist dogma that has long been the Left's millstone, describing himself instead as a libertarian-anarchist.

Chomsky is often called a dissident—“the most prominent intellectual dissident in the Western world,” in the words of one admiring account. That is an odd label for someone who writes political commentaries in an open society, where opinions of every conceivable stripe can win a hearing. But Chomsky himself has contributed to this grotesque misperception by depicting the United States as an *enemy* of intellectual freedom, one that has achieved the Soviet Union's goal of thought conformity without having to resort to the overt repression that gave Communism a bad name. Thus, he suggests, while American dissidents need not fear the concentration camp, they are likely to face marginalization, a more efficient and less messy way of smothering inconvenient ideas.

IT MUST be said that Chomsky also has his critics, a number of whom have contributed essays to a new and much-needed book, *The Anti-Chomsky Reader*.^{*} Its chapters track the themes of Chomsky's intellectual and political life: Southeast Asia, the cold war, the war on terror, the media, Israel, anti-Americanism. There are also two essays on Chomsky's work in linguistics, the field where he initially forged his academic reputation. The most comprehensive critique of Chomsky that has yet appeared, the *Reader* benefits from the political sophistication of its contributors, most of whom are familiar with

^{*} Edited by Peter Collier and David Horowitz. Encounter Books, 260 pp., \$17.95.

the dynamics of radical politics and are not distracted by Chomsky's pretense to scholarly rigor and truth-seeking.

One of the most illuminating chapters concerns his role in the debate over Vietnam. As its author, Stephen J. Morris, stresses, Chomsky's position was at sharp variance with that of most liberal doves, who tended, at least at first, to regard American involvement in Vietnam as a tragic case of a wrong war fought for largely praiseworthy motives. By contrast, Chomsky treated Vietnam as the logical result of America's overarching drive for global hegemony. His scorn for the liberal interpretation of American motives established a pattern; in subsequent years, he would reserve some of his most venomous barbs for the policies of liberal Democrats like Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. How, he would wonder sarcastically, could a country guilty of the most egregious abuses of human rights serve as a model for others?

Chomsky's writings on Vietnam seethed with moral outrage over the suffering of the Vietnamese people, which he blamed entirely on the United States. But what about the criminal acts of the Communist North? As Morris points out, on the few occasions when Chomsky acknowledged such acts, he would justify them by reaching back to Lenin to argue that drastic measures were sometimes necessary in order to build a strong revolutionary state. If this seemed to belie his carefully cultivated image as an investigator unyielding in his determination to see through official rationalizations and apologetics, it should also be noted that during his wartime visits to North Vietnam, Chomsky behaved much like every other willfully blind fellow traveler. According to Morris, he invariably found evidence of nascent democratic stirrings in the North, as expressed through grassroots participation in local village councils.

In fact, of course, after the American defeat and withdrawal there was to be no freedom in Vietnam, at the village level or anywhere else—only purges, repression, and labor camps in the Soviet manner. The victorious Communists established a regime of persecution that particularly targeted religious believers, ethnic Chinese, peasants opposed to collectivization, and those from the wrong class background. The result was the boat people: hundreds of thousands of ordinary Vietnamese who braved the seas rather than remain under totalitarian rule.

Some open-minded members of the American antiwar community were appalled at the ruthlessness of the new regime; a few were sufficiently disturbed to issue public declarations of protest. But not Chomsky. According to Morris, he declined to endorse statements objecting to the massive persecu-

tion of the conquered South Vietnamese, and then, as evidence of atrocities mounted, lurched from one rationalization to another to justify his continued support of the Communists. Finally he played his trump card, suggesting that progressives should hold their tongues lest they inadvertently bolster the interests of American imperialism.

THE SAME moral blindness, multiplied, was on display in Chomsky's indifference to the genocide perpetrated against the Cambodian people by the Khmer Rouge. His first instinct when confronted with reports of mass killings was to discredit the sources by pointing to the "extreme unreliability" of refugee accounts. When the evidence became too overwhelming to wave away, he and Edward Herman, a University of Pennsylvania professor who co-authored a number of Chomsky's books, argued that the Khmer Rouge had both good and bad points: "On the one hand, oppression, regimentation, and terror; on the other, constructive achievement for much of the people." When this, too, no longer sufficed, he advanced the idea that the United States, "the torture and political-murder capital of the world," had no standing to judge the acts of lesser criminals like Pol Pot—this, of a regime whose acts of inhumanity count among the worst excesses of 20th-century totalitarianism. For a man who portrayed himself as an independent thinker and able to avoid the errors of past Soviet apologists, Chomsky behaved no differently over Vietnam and Cambodia than the most loyal party hacks.

And not just over Vietnam and Cambodia. Although occasionally critical of the Soviet Union—he regarded it as excessively bureaucratic and a bad socialist model—Chomsky ignored or minimized its acts of aggression while concentrating single-mindedly on America's alleged misdeeds in the cold war. As Thomas M. Nichols writes here, he interpreted every postwar U.S. initiative, beginning with the Marshall Plan, as designed to advance a grand scheme for world economic dominance. "Under U.S. influence," he wrote, "Europe was reconstructed in a particular mode, not quite that sought by the anti-fascist resistance, though the fascist and Nazi collaborators were generally satisfied." So much for postwar European prosperity.

Chomsky reacted to the cold war's denouement with anger. He had never expressed any real sympathy for the plight of the luckless peoples under Soviet domination, seeming rather to regard Eastern Europe as a natural part of the Russian sphere

of influence. In the Chomskyan universe, therefore, the collapse of Communism was not a step forward for world freedom but signaled another deplorable extension of the American economic empire. As he sardonically put it a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, "With the return of something like traditional relationships, the East can now provide other benefits, including a huge pool of easily exploited labor."

The extent of Chomsky's frustration at America's cold-war triumph was revealed in his response to Vaclav Havel, the spiritual leader of Czechoslovakia's "velvet revolution." In 1990, shortly after his election as his country's first post-Communist president, Havel addressed a joint session of Congress, during the course of which he praised America and spoke movingly of the United States as a beacon of freedom.

Nichols quotes an incensed letter written by Chomsky to his friend, the radical columnist Alexander Cockburn, pouring scorn on Havel's "embarrassingly silly and morally repugnant Sunday School sermon" and comparing the Czech president's words to the drivel written by Communist apparatchiks in countries like Vietnam. Chomsky then added: "It's . . . necessary to point out to the half-dozen or so sane people who remain, that in comparison to conditions imposed by U.S. tyranny and violence, East Europe under Russian rule was practically a paradise."

As with his refusal to acknowledge the crimes of revolutionary regimes in Southeast Asia, so with his rage at the demise of Communism: what impelled Chomsky above all was simple anti-Americanism. Hence his fury at the recognition won by the United States for its role in winning the cold war. He understood well that the conclusion of that decades-long struggle would doom the various third-world "liberation" efforts, like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, that had won his support. Thus, with the emergence of the United States as the world's lone superpower, and the broad acceptance of free-market economic models, Chomsky's writings became more strident, more polemical, and ever more anti-American in tone.

IN BUILDING his most recent case against the United States, Chomsky has placed great emphasis on his theories about the press as an instrument of propaganda. In his book *Manufacturing Consent* and elsewhere, he has asserted that the function of the American press is not to inform but rather to persuade people to endorse the policies and goals of the

economic and political elites. Exactly as with the captive and censored media of the Soviet Union, he argues, the basic purpose of the media in the United States is the transmission of propaganda. What makes the American "propaganda model" all the more insidious is the fact that people actually believe the press is free.

Chomsky has laid much stress on the soundness of his scholarly approach to this subject, buttressed as usual by ranks of intimidating-looking footnotes. His arguments about the nature of the American press in particular and of the American system in general are, he repeatedly insists, based on the same type of logical, scientific thinking that he put to use in the development of his theories about transformational grammar and other issues in linguistics. Yet even a cursory assessment reveals his "methodology" to be sheer illusion, quasi-scholarly hocus pocus.

In a chapter in the *Reader* on Chomsky and the media, Eli Lehrer analyzes Chomsky's claim to have "proved" the propagandistic nature of the press by comparing the number of media accounts of atrocities committed by American allies with the number of accounts of crimes committed by our adversaries. An example Chomsky frequently drags out concerns the relatively full attention paid to the murder of Father Jerzy Popieluszko, a Solidarity advocate killed by Communist agents, as opposed to the more meager coverage of the murder of a group of Jesuit priests by Salvadoran death squads. Entirely elided in this simple-minded exercise is that every event in Poland during the Solidarity period took on a magnified significance because of its implications for the survival of Communism.

Just as the American media are the pliant instruments of the ruling elites, so, in Chomsky's reckoning, is American society at large controlled by "unaccountable private tyrannies" and presided over by elected officials who are the "willing subordinates to the systems of actual power." In *Hegemony or Survival*, his latest work, he describes the American people as existing in a condition of "marginalized passivity" made possible by a system of "thought control" imposed by the corporate-political-media Establishment. What "remains of democracy," he expostulates, "is largely the right to choose among commodities."

If all this sounds familiar, it should. There is nothing either new or unique in Chomsky's depiction of American society, which comes straight out of the pseudo-Marxist "analysis" proffered by the New Left some 40 years ago. Indeed, these ludicrously false clichés are part of what eventually made the New

Left an object of ridicule and contempt. That Chomsky can still espouse such sophomoric views without challenge, and to such applause, suggests that neither he nor the Left has learned anything from the upheavals of the last decades.

A FINAL obsession of Chomsky and his fans is the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. Like some other Jewish leftists, Chomsky was initially opposed to the creation of Israel as a Jewish state in the late 1940's, advocating instead a binational socialist state of Arabs and Jews. But Chomsky characteristically added a twist to the formula: according to an essay in the *Reader* by Paul Bogdanor, he proposed a territorial division whereby Jews and Arabs would occupy separate cantons, but Arabs would enjoy the right to migrate into the Jewish cantons while Jews would be prevented or discouraged from moving into the Arab ones.

Chomsky eventually abandoned the idea of a binational state altogether. After the Six-Day war of 1967, he voiced increasing exasperation with the mainstream of American Jewry over what he regarded as its triumphalist response to Israel's military victory. Soon, the theme of Israel as the principal cause of the Middle East's misery took its place as a fixture of his writing alongside the theme of the United States as the principal cause of the world's misery.

As with the United States, Chomsky's views toward Israel have become more and more envenomed with the passage of years. He now depicts the Jewish state as the world's number-two terror power, right behind the U.S., while also claiming to see many parallels between today's Israel and South Africa under apartheid. He has described Israel not only as a Sparta-like warrior state but also as suffering from a "Samson complex" that will drive it to destroy all around it if it cannot attain its expansionist objectives. Nor, in writing about Israel, has he shrunk from tossing in references to Nazism and fascism. Although he has refrained from direct comparisons, he frequently likens Israeli policies to certain features of Nazi rule, claiming, for example, that Israel's detention facilities are similar to concentration camps.

And so we return full-circle to the main arena. For if, in his use of the Nazi card, Chomsky is moderately restrained when it comes to Israel, he is utterly brazen about it in the case of America. No book of Chomsky's would be complete without its comparisons of American policies to the policies of the Third Reich, of American motives to Nazi rationalizations, and of American leaders to Hitler and his henchmen. In its prosecution of the cold war, he

writes, America "picked up where the Nazis left off." The Kennedy and Johnson administrations supported what he calls the Latin American equivalents of "Heinrich Himmler's extermination squads." "Of course the United States claims it has reasons," Chomsky exclaimed in the midst of a sweeping denunciation of American policy in the *Washington Post*. "And the Nazis claimed they had reasons for gassing the Jews." To the suggestion that when the U.S. intervenes in the world, its purpose is to promote democracy and stability, he replies that Hitler and Mussolini cited peace, stability, and progress as justifications for their aggressions, too. To American corporate executives under the impression that economic success will advance the public good, he has a word of advice: "even the Himmlers and Mengesles convinced themselves that they were engaged in noble and courageous acts."

This, then, is what Chomsky's exercise in independent thinking and scholarly rigor comes down to: a vulgar, lockstep Marxism according to which every American action is determined by a predatory economic appetite and the drive for global dominance; an affinity for third-world "revolutionary" regimes that control the press, repress inquiry, and brutalize those who express inconvenient ideas; a denial of America's historic achievement in winning the cold war and of the great gains for freedom this entailed; an invocation of the "Nazi" epithet to smear the democratic societies of Israel and the United States. And this coarse propagandist serves as a political guide and moral icon to hundreds of thousands around the world, and as the very model of a "dissident."

Those who have bestowed this label on Chomsky surely understood that in doing so they have placed him on the same moral plane as the figures who offered intellectual resistance to Communist regimes during the cold war. But those dissidents *knew* the meaning of freedom, and grasped how and why Communism uniquely threatened the life of the free mind. Those dissidents also appreciated America's role in the struggle for freedom. Having experienced the daily lies of Communism, they were undeceived by the "democratic" declarations issuing from the mouths of third-world despots and would-be despots.

On each and every count, the dissidents of the Communist experience are on the opposite end of a yawning political divide from Noam Chomsky. That so much of the Left today seems to take its stand with him, and not with Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, Sharansky, or Havel, is one of the continuing intellectual and moral scandals of our era.

OBSERVATIONS

Architecture (Bling!)

Michael J. Lewis

LIKE BEACHCOMBERS, architecture critics are at the mercy of whatever happens to drift in. They may stare for a decade at an empty horizon, or a typhoon or some other disaster at sea may toss them a sudden bonanza. That is what has happened with architecture since September 11, 2001. For critics, especially for critics based in New York, these have been palmy days. The big questions posed by the rebuilding of Ground Zero remain unanswered: how to reconcile commemoration with commerce, how to adjudicate between the claims of the living and the dead, how to express national events and themes in an architectural culture that is defiantly international.

A strange moment, therefore, for Herbert Muschamp to have relinquished his influential post as architecture critic of the *New York Times*, a position he held since 1992. This past June, Muschamp announced that he was resigning in order to explore “other op-

tions.” Inevitably there have been rumors that he was forced out by the *Times*, which has been known to demote upward rather than to fire; a lengthy piece by Rachel Donadio in the *New York Observer* speculated that he had become something of an embarrassment to the newspaper’s editors. Whatever the grounds, his job has been assigned to Nicolai Ouroussoff, formerly of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Not since the 1950’s, when Lewis Mumford charted the triumph of modernism from his perch at the *New Yorker*, has the tenure of a critic been so eventful. Among the big occasions on Muschamp’s watch were the openings of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, and of the Getty Museum outside Los Angeles; the Millennium Dome in London; the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.; the memorial to the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing; the architectural reunification of Berlin; and a host of consequential projects in New York City.

The most important development may have occurred within

the practice of architecture itself. A generation ago, architecture was still a professional field. Apart from a few larger-than-life figures like Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, architects were relatively anonymous figures. Local architects handled most work except for complex projects that might require the specialized knowledge of a large urban firm. The architect’s personality, in the sense of an idiosyncratic or deliberately cultivated individuality, was immaterial. But since the 1970’s the field has been transformed by a celebrity culture of architects who have cultivated instantly recognizable signature styles: Frank Gehry’s fluttering walls, Richard Meier’s immaculate white cubes, Daniel Libeskind’s fractious crystalline geometries.

The rise of this celebrity culture has been widely and justifiably lamented, but we have only begun to take its full measure. Because of temperament and training, Muschamp, more than any other critic, was splendidly equipped to comment intelligently on its development, to suggest how it

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happened, and to speculate about what it might mean. But there was a complication: he himself took an active part in promoting this self-same culture, a fact that has made his own rise and fall of more than merely journalistic interest.

FOR MUSCHAMP, art and celebrity have always been inseparable. In 1965, while a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania, he precociously entered the circle of the Pop artist Andy Warhol, who might be regarded as his mentor. After graduation he worked as a window dresser for Design Research, an early innovator in the retailing of designer chic. Later he studied in London at the Architectural Association, an incubator of many of the theoretical movements of the next generation. Upon his return to the U.S., he began teaching criticism at Parsons School of Design in New York and writing for *Artforum*. In 1988 he was recruited as the *New Republic's* first official architecture critic.

When, a few years later, Muschamp moved to the *New York Times*, the tone of its architectural coverage changed overnight. Unlike his sober predecessor, Paul Goldberger, he brought to the paper a jaunty and flippant sensibility in which personality loomed large—the personality of architects and the personality of Muschamp himself. This was a new species of criticism—certainly new for the *Times*—and one that had no use for the traditional barrier separating the critic from his subject.

Muschamp's advent also came at a particularly receptive moment. The building boom of the previous decade, which had been dominated by the playful historicism of the postmodern movement, had run out its string. In sophisticated circles, postmodernism was now passé, regarded as an unprincipled vehicle for commercial speculation with an unfortunate addiction to red granite stripes. It was not yet

clear what would succeed it. One candidate was deconstruction, a highly intellectualized alternative to postmodernism that was then enjoying considerable prestige in schools of architecture.

To his credit, Muschamp viewed the pretensions of deconstruction with bemusement. Instead of losing himself in theory, he preferred to judge buildings on their optical properties and on his intuitive response to them. Faced with pretense and obscurantism, he responded much as Warhol had, with a kind of breezy insouciance.

In fact, Muschamp had little interest in any architectural tendency at all. Instead, he embraced a wildly heterogeneous group of architects, each of whom offered a distinctly individual style. A half-dozen received preferential treatment at his hands: Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Renzo Piano, Peter Eisenman, and Rafael Vinoly. And the Muschamp treatment could be career-making. His 5,000-word paean to "The Miracle in Bilbao," Gehry's new Guggenheim Museum in Spain, helped make the architect a household name; his promotion of Hadid turned her into an international luminary long before she had anything to show for herself but a portfolio of visionary and quite unbuildable drawings.

ALTHOUGH THE work of these architects varied greatly, to Muschamp it had the common quality of integrity—his favorite term of praise. By this he did not mean integrity either in the sense of personal probity or in the sense, associated with the 19th-century critic John Ruskin, of the truthful use of materials and structural systems. For Muschamp, integrity meant the rigor with which a formal idea was carried out and carried through, so that the signature style was visible everywhere. The results should be, as he wrote of a building by Philip Johnson, "invariably self-consistent, pure within their own stylistic

idiom." In a word, uncompromising.

Unlike paintings and sculpture, however, buildings make considerable compromises: with sites, with budgets, with the limitations of materials, and with the requirements of programs and of clients. It is the ingenious resolution of these problems in a unique design, as in an elegant solution to a baffling equation, that demands the most of an architect's skill. For Muschamp, that was clearly too messy; this is no doubt why his chief heroes have been the makers of institutional buildings, and particularly museums: commissions that are free of most of the pressures and accommodations of commercial practice.

In any case, Muschamp spent little time developing the concept of integrity—by, for example, analyzing paths of circulation, nuances of siting, or the countless small details of profiles, joints, moldings, reveals, revetments, corners, and all the other members that form the living face of a building. Most of his reviews were devoted instead to putting into words how a building made him *feel*. And to this task he brought his own signature style, bombarding the reader with allusions to pop culture, especially movies. What Muschamp seems to have discovered was that, by drenching his reviews in pop references, he could attract the sort of audience that did not normally attend to architecture.

Scarcely a building failed to remind Muschamp of a movie he had seen. The bar at New York's renovated Hudson hotel? "Kubrick territory." The new Broadway hotel? "Think Edward Hopper crossed with Pedro Almodovar." The Guggenheim in Bilbao? "[A] woman's skirt flying up in the air, reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*." The World War II Memorial in Washington? "A digitized backdrop, like the Colosseum in *Gladiator*." The new Prada store in New York? "Anto-

nioni is recast as a shopping experience. . . . Miuccia Prada plays Monica Vitti to Rem Koolhaas's Richard Harris."

Such stream-of-consciousness became the hallmark of the Muschamp style. Its effect is somewhat like a reverie by Walt Whitman as updated by Andy Warhol, with incidents and vignettes replaced by brand names and advertising logos. It also clearly owed much to Tom Wolfe, evidently the source for the distinctive cadence Muschamp employed for his climaxes: an accelerating gallop that outpaces its verbs and ends in a squeal. Thus, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles:

Disney Hall must be assembled within the mind piece by piece as you approach and walk around it. A Surrealist ethos also suffuses the design: the imagineering impulse of Disney as well as of Magritte. Pumpkin into carriage, cabbage into concert hall, bippidi-bobbidi-boo.

The Seattle Public Library:

[A] willful exercise in complex geometry is actually a simple envelope to enclose mass. The interior becomes a greenhouse, the exterior a compressed, five-sided, Rubik's Cube of a skyline. Bling!

The 80 South Street Tower:

We recognize the similarity of the individual glass cubes to International Style office towers of the mid-20th century. But we have never seen one of those towers dance. From certain angles, this building is all hips. Chicka-boom!

ALTHOUGH MUSCHAMP never sought to disguise his personal intimacy with the architects he reviewed—he felt free, for example, to offer anecdotes about what Frank Gehry thought of the library in Muschamp's apartment—not until 2000 did he breach the wall be-

tween critic and patron. But in that year he participated in a committee to solicit and evaluate designs for the new headquarters of the *New York Times*. The winning design by Renzo Piano, a design Muschamp himself helped pick, was then lavishly praised in one of his *Times* columns.

As if that were not startling enough, Muschamp also launched a lengthy attack on the design submitted by Cesar Pelli, an architect well known for his sleek corporate towers. For Muschamp, Pelli's credentials alone were grounds for rejecting him out of hand. The *Times* might be a corporation, he wrote, but it was not *that* sort of corporation:

Yes, the *Times* is a powerful institution, but of a particular kind. It is not part of so-called "black car" culture. We take subways. . . . The paper has the responsibility to challenge and correct, not blindly affirm, the corporate world's view of itself.

As Marxist class analysis went, this was hardly superior stuff ("we take subways"). And the architectural analysis was even poorer. Muschamp's resounding condemnation was based on nothing more than the symmetry of Pelli's design (it affirmed "classical notions of hierarchy") and its vague resemblance to an obelisk ("that most ancient authoritarian symbol").

All this was cover for a lack of thought-through aesthetic criteria. Insofar as Muschamp's judgments of commercial buildings had any discernible rationale, it seemed to derive from another source entirely. As he wrote after September 11, a critic's job, "especially in a relativistic time, is to show that it is possible to distinguish between progressive and retrogressive work." That distinguishing line, he elaborated, ran "between buildings that promote humanist or Enlightenment virtues (even by questioning them) and those that ob-

struct or retard the realization of those virtues in public space."

Leaving aside the question of how one could promote Enlightenment values by working to undermine them, Muschamp's conception of architectural patronage—of who pays the bills, and why—was peculiar indeed. In his ideal scenario, it seemed, every architect had to act as a kind of Shostakovich, embedding within his work cryptic messages of subversion that the client was too thick to recognize, although he was expected to pay for the joke. This was hopelessly naive, as Muschamp surely recognized. It is notable that when he did finally come face-to-face with a powerful developer, in the person of the incorrigibly retrogressive Donald Trump, he immediately displayed a strong tendency toward power worship.*

SO LONG as Muschamp was evaluating progressive museum designs and urging commercial developers to build more "enlightened" buildings, his career seemed relatively assured. There was the occasional erratic column—most notoriously, a rapturous 1996 review of a Calvin Klein underwear ad in Times Square—but he did not stumble badly until September 11 and its architectural aftermath. That story has now been told by his predecessor at the *Times*, Paul Goldberger, in *Up From Zero*, a lively account of the rebuilding of Ground Zero.[†]

Rather than concentrating on the competing designs for the World Trade Center site, Goldberger has written a cautionary

* In 1995, having at first panned the Trump International Tower and Hotel, designed by Philip Johnson, and then having proposed that the three men meet to discuss his review, the critic ended up not only praising "the color, contentiousness, and comedy Mr. Trump brings to the contemporary urban scene" but gratuitously defending the developer's very public love life ("the behavior some call womanizing is not a radical departure from what we call art"). All in all, not the most stirring example of how to "challenge and correct" the corporate culture.

† Random House, 274 pp., \$24.95.

case study of architectural patronage and what happens when the lines of authority get crossed. His theme is the muddled and overlapping responsibility of the various players at Ground Zero: on the one hand, the developer Larry Silverstein, the Port Authority, and the city and state—all of them represented in the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC)—and, on the other hand, the various victim and survivor groups that have played a forceful but unpredictable role throughout the proceedings.

Goldberger is particularly insightful on Muschamp's own efforts to insert himself into the rebuilding process. During the summer of 2002, in preparation for the first anniversary of the attacks, the critic enlisted a group of his favorite architects to brainstorm for a special issue of the *New York Times* magazine. His team included Richard Meier and Stephen Holl along with such stalwarts as Hadid, Koolhaas, and Eisenman. But, rather than compel these mavericks to collaborate, Muschamp assigned to each a different site and a different building. Thanks to an ingenious proposal by Frederic Schwarz to submerge nearby West Street in an underground viaduct, creating above it sixteen acres of contiguous real estate, Muschamp had seen that it would be possible to set aside Ground Zero for memorial purposes and still be able to replace the missing office footage and promote innovative architecture elsewhere.

It was a bold initiative, but it was rapidly overtaken by events. Even before Muschamp's portfolio was published, the LMDC announced an architectural competition for the World Trade Center site; there was little interest left over for the sideshow on West Street, and Muschamp was roundly mocked for his intervention in the main event. As Goldberger tells the story, even his former employer, the *New Republic*, con-

demned him for "acting as a patron as well as a commentator" and for placing himself "in the indefensible and untenable position of both judge and jury."

Having lost much of 2002 in organizing his dream team, and having failed to be a player in the first round, Muschamp resumed the role of critic. Again he faltered badly. When the seven finalists were announced in late December, Muschamp weighed in heavily in favor of Daniel Libeskind's proposal. "If you are looking for the marvelous, here's where you will find it," he wrote. "Mr. Libeskind has fashioned a new set of crystals, brilliantly faceted skyscrapers, forms that recreate the aspiration many architects felt when plate glass was new."

Six weeks later, after the competitors had been winnowed to Libeskind and Rafael Vinoly's THINK group, Muschamp made an abrupt *volte-face*. Libeskind's "perfect balance between aggression and desire" of late 2002 now became "a startlingly aggressive tour de force, a war memorial to a looming conflict that has scarcely begun . . . an emotionally manipulative exercise in visual codes." Muschamp went on to call the design demagogic, militaristic, and—presumably worst of all—nostalgic.

The reason for this sudden turnaround remains unclear. Goldberger speculates that once the contest became two-way, Muschamp went with Vinoly, an architect he had long promoted. But so vehement was his antipathy toward the Libeskind design that it could only be read as a last-minute, full-court press to influence the jury. That the prize then fell to Libeskind anyway became a sign of the critic's waning ability to shape events.

MUSCHAMP'S FAILURE to offer useful suggestions for the role of architecture at Ground Zero illuminates the limitations of his approach and

taste. This should have been easy to foresee. A coterie of individual architect-celebrities, each of them distinguished by his cultivation of an eye-catching personal style, was not up to the tragic scope of a problem that was at once collective and impersonal. Nor could an architectural ideology predicated on a loose platform of negations—subverting hierarchy, questioning authority, challenging assumptions—muster the confidence necessary for positive affirmations. Having had their "hierarchy" challenged by four passenger-crammed projectiles, Americans rightly had little tolerance for snide gestures from the façade-merchants of armchair radicalism.

In the end, even Muschamp's exuberant appreciation of certain buildings appears a thin and restrictive thing. For all his range of cultural references—not only movies but costume, popular music, and food—his criticism is almost exclusively limited to the one aspect of a building that falls within the compass of fashion: its novelty-value as an image, the graphic impression it makes. Of course, it does not discredit a critic to say that he has a keen eye for the fashionability of a building. In a commercial society, fashionability is a sign of vitality—witness the work of Stanford White, Raymond Hood, or Mies van der Rohe. But whereas a dress or a musical may be encompassed by its novelty, a building has other duties.

One of the most enduringly brilliant analyses of architectural failure is Lewis Mumford's 1959 essay, "What Wright Hath Wrought," a devastating indictment of the newly opened Guggenheim Museum. Mumford acknowledged that Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece was breathtaking in form, rigorously developed in detail, and had an "indescribable individuality." And yet he went on to damn every aspect of the building in minute and ruthless detail: materials, fenestration, lighting, circulation, even tonality. Mum-

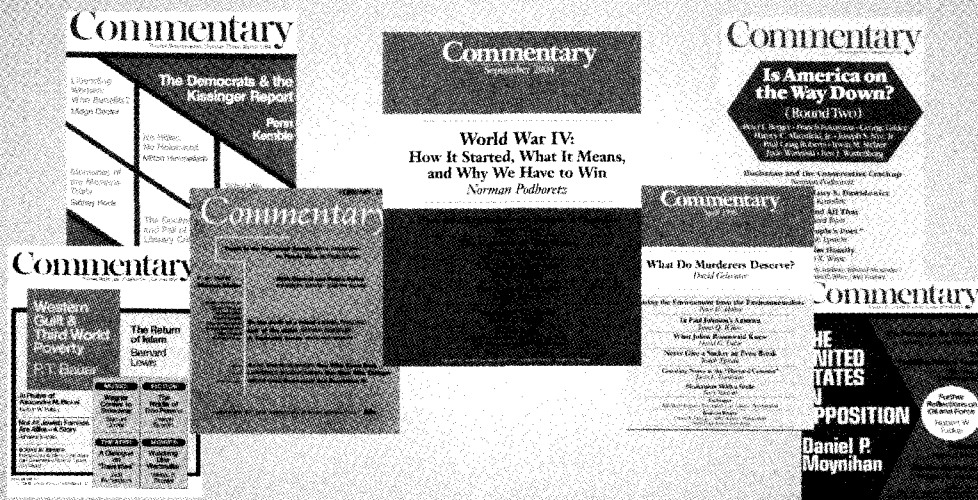
ford's personal friendship with Wright did not spare the final verdict: "a monumental and ultimately mischievous failure." One cannot imagine Muschamp ever having written such a piece.

Some buildings are indeed Happenings, spontaneous performances of joyous personal anarchy. But most are not, and they must be judged by other criteria. One such

criterion might be called architectural citizenship—the participation of an individual building within the larger community of buildings that surround it, and in a larger sense within the civilization that produced it. Only through such meaningful connections can architecture perform the serious cultural duties that it is sometimes called upon to fulfill: serving as a house of the dead, or as a symbol of

nationhood, or as a carrier of civilization itself. Muschamp, by temperament and biography, was unable to judge architecture in such terms. But that is true of our culture of celebrity in general, a culture that he did so much to advance and that, in architecture as in other fields of artistic endeavor, has had so little to contribute to the central dilemmas of our day.

Commentary



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DANCE

Jerome Robbins in Person

Terry Teachout

SIX YEARS after his death, Jerome Robbins remains a key figure in the world of dance. Though his ballets are far less widely performed than those of George Balanchine, his mentor and master, they are staple items on the programs of such major companies as the Paris Opéra Ballet, the San Francisco Ballet, and above all the New York City Ballet (NYCB), the company for which Robbins created the vast majority of his dances. And though comparatively little of his work for Broadway survives except in fragments, at least two of the shows with which he was most closely associated, *West Side Story* (1957) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), continue to be performed in versions that make use of his dances. The revival of *Fiddler* that opened last season at Broadway's Minskoff Theatre, for example, was completely restaged by the director David Levcaux—except for Robbins's original

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choreography, which was scrupulously reproduced.

Yet for all his continuing renown, Robbins has remained no less enigmatic a figure than he was in his lifetime. As I wrote seven years ago in these pages:

Robbins's fame . . . is based solely on his work, not his life. He rehearses behind closed doors and rarely gives interviews; no book has yet been written about him, and while he is known to be a demanding taskmaster, dancers' memoirs have typically been circumspect in commenting on his character.¹

To be sure, some aspects of his private life have recently made their way into the public record. In 2000, the playwright Arthur Laurents, who worked with him on *West Side Story* and *Gypsy* (1959), wrote candidly and caustically in *Original Story By: A Memoir of Broadway and Hollywood* about Robbins's homosexuality and his still-controversial decision to "name names" to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1953 (he had been a Communist as a young man). Two years later, the journalist Greg

Lawrence published *Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins*, a tell-all biography based in part on interviews with some of Robbins's friends and associates. But Laurents's book was biased by his undisguised loathing for Robbins, while Lawrence was severely hampered by the fact that Robbins's estate refused to give him access to the choreographer's private papers or grant him permission to reprint excerpts from Robbins's letters.

By then, however, the Robbins estate was already cooperating with two other biographers, Deborah Jowitt, the dance critic of the *Village Voice*, and Amanda Vaill, the author of *Everybody Was So Young* (1998), a well-received book about the American expatriates Gerald and Sara Murphy. Vaill's *Somewhere: A Life of Jerome Robbins* is scheduled for publication next fall; Jowitt's *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance*, has just appeared.² The two writers had been expected to differ greatly in emphasis, with Vaill con-

¹"Choreography by Jerome Robbins," April 1997. This essay is reprinted in *A Terry Teachout Reader* (Yale).

²Simon & Schuster, 619 pp., \$40.

centrating on the man and Jowitt on the artist. In the event, Jowitt's book has turned out to be a more or less conventional critical biography, one whose discussions of Robbins's ballets and Broadway shows are integrated into a detailed narrative of his life.

The critical half of Jowitt's book is admirable: serious, sensible, clearly written. The biographical half, though competent and informative, is less satisfactory, in part because she has no gift for literary portraiture. Robbins himself comes through vividly (if on occasion euphemistically), but none of his friends or colleagues, not even Balanchine or Leonard Bernstein, with whom he collaborated on *West Side Story* and *Fancy Free* (1944), his first ballet, is evoked memorably. In addition, many important episodes in his life, most notably his involvement with the Communist party, are discussed so cursorily as to remain largely opaque. Here as elsewhere, *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance* mostly fails to fill in the essential cultural context without which much of Robbins's behavior is likely to strike even the most sympathetic of readers as inexplicable to the point of unintelligibility.

In one important area, however, Jowitt has made superbly resourceful use of Robbins's papers. The creator of *Fiddler on the Roof*, it turns out, was obsessed with the subject of his Jewishness, returning to it time and again in his journals and other unpublished autobiographical writings. Jowitt has skillfully used this hitherto unavailable material to paint a compelling picture of a deeply divided man who for years found it all but impossible to come to terms with being a Jew.

JEROME ROBBINS was born Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz in 1918. Harry Rabinowitz, his father, had left his Russian *shtetl* at the age of fifteen, walked to Amsterdam, and boarded a ship for the U.S. in order to avoid conscription into the Russian army, service in which was a virtual death

sentence for Jews. Lena, his mother, emigrated under less dire circumstances, but she, too, was fleeing anti-Semitic persecution.

A hard-working couple who ran a corset factory in New Jersey, the Rabinowitizes were not artistically inclined, and though they allowed young Jerome to study music and dance, the thought that he might become a professional dancer horrified them both. At the same time, his mother expected him to excel, albeit in a more traditional manner, and he would long be haunted by her expectations. He later recalled in his journal that Lena "set me up for extraordinary standards. As I felt she was perfect (& she wanted me to feel that) how could I ever achieve her love, I who was so imperfect."

Though the Rabinowitizes were lax in their religious observances, they were nonetheless intensely aware of their cultural heritage, and in 1924 Lena took her children back to her own *shtetl* (which by then had become part of Poland) for a visit. Jerome was enthralled by this glimpse of the fast-disappearing world of his fathers, as he was by every other aspect of his family's Jewishness:

My being a Jew is not because I was bar mitzvahed. It is within the deepest part of my soul which was nourished by the countless unidentified cultural love stories . . . [t]he superstitions, the temperaments, the fears & the glorious good times, the celebrations, food, inflexions, songs; in the fights and the jokes.

But the casual anti-Semitism of his classmates frightened him, and so "from all of that I closed myself off—forgot it & threw [it] out (I was sure)." Once he finally managed to extricate himself from the family business and to begin the full-time study of dance, he changed his name to Robbins and tried to put his past behind him. "I didn't want to be like my father, the Jew," he would later

write. "I wanted to be safe, protected, assimilated, hidden in among the Goys, the majority."

Robbins's attitude toward his "queerness" (as he referred to it) was equally conflicted. Though he readily declared himself a homosexual in order to avoid serving in World War II, he also had sexual involvements with women, then and later. "Please save me from being 'gay' and dirty," he would write in a diary entry made in 1942, not long before his draft board classified him as 4-F.

In *Fancy Free*, a comic ballet about three sailors who try to pick up women while on shore leave in New York, Robbins made his conflicted nature clear—by omission. Though the creators of *Fancy Free*, Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, were both Jewish and homosexual, the ballet sounds the deracinated, "all-American" note to be found in most Broadway musicals and Hollywood films of the same vintage, just as its characters are portrayed as aggressively (if haplessly) heterosexual.³

The popular success of *Fancy Free* turned the hitherto obscure Robbins into a public figure who could not afford to have his homosexuality become generally known. From then on he conducted himself more discreetly, going so far as to become engaged to the ballerina Nora Kaye. He also continued to suppress his Jewishness, shying away from Jewish themes in his ballets and rarely working on musicals with explicitly Jewish characters or subject matter. Instead, he created a series of works, including the ballets *Facsimile* (1946, music by Bernstein) and *The Guests* (1949, music by Marc Blitzstein), in which he portrayed his anxieties in symbolic terms. (*Facsimile*, for instance, was a choreographic study of a romantic triangle involving a woman and two men.)

³ Revealingly, Robbins's initial inspiration for *Fancy Free* had come from the gay painter Paul Cadmus's *The Fleet's In!* (1934), a portrayal of sailors on shore leave in which homosexuality is clearly implied. No such implications would make their way into *Fancy Free*.

Nowhere was his divided self more fully manifest than in *West Side Story*. Created by four Jewish homosexuals (Arthur Laurents wrote the book and Stephen Sondheim the lyrics), *West Side Story* was originally conceived by Robbins as a modernized version of *Romeo and Juliet* in which one family would be Jewish and the other Catholic. Early on, though, it was turned into the story of a romance between a Puerto Rican girl and a member of an Anglo street gang. To be sure, the most memorable musical number, "Somewhere," is a ballad whose lyrics refer not just to Tony and Maria in particular but to persecuted minorities in general: "There's a place for us, /Somewhere a place for us. . . . /We'll find a new way of living, /We'll find a way of forgiving." Yet the makers of *West Side Story* chose to distance themselves from the autobiographical subtext of "Somewhere," and as a result its undisguised emotionalism, like that of the show as a whole, comes across as sentimental, even mawkish.

NOT UNTIL 1964 did Robbins deal directly with his Jewishness on stage—and then he did so with a vengeance.

A musical-comedy adaptation of the *shtetl* tales of Sholem Aleichem, *Fiddler on the Roof* was seen by some hostile critics as sentimentalized to a fault.⁴ In retrospect, though, what is most striking about the show is that it makes no attempt to disguise its ethnic subject matter for easier consumption by non-Jewish audiences. Though the songs of Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick are not altogether free of Broadway-style uplift, Joseph Stein's book presents the Russian-Jewish experience with a straightforwardness all but unprecedented outside the Yiddish-language theater: the first act of *Fiddler* ends with a brutal pogrom, the second with the forced emigration to America of the villagers of Anatevka. And while Tevye the dairyman is pre-

sented as a sympathetic character, his (at least) initial refusal to sanction the heterodox ways of his daughters has a convincingly hard edge.

Having hitherto shunned such themes in his work, Robbins now took them up with excitement. He warned Bock and Harnick that their score had to dig deeper: "If every song is sweet, sentimental, sad, touching and nostalgic, all will come off as Second Avenue." Not only did he encourage Boris Aronson to model his sets after the paintings of Marc Chagall, but he found inspiration for his own choreography in actual Jewish wedding dances:

Without any constricting elements except a rudimentary rhythm & an avid impulse to express their communal joy—the men stamped, kicked, hit the floor . . . tossed their arms about, flung their bodies around—each individual taking off as the ecstasy and inspiration moved him.

Nor was his fervor restricted to surface details. In a set of production notes dating from early 1964, Robbins analyzed Tevye's dilemma in language reminiscent of the strikingly similar preoccupations of such Jewish writers as Isaac Bashevis Singer: "The drama of the play is to watch a man carefully treading his way between his acceptance of his sustaining *belief* (that way of life that is centuries old, practiced as if it were still in the Middle Ages, which protects & defends him & makes his life tolerable)—and his wry questioning of it within the confinements of the belief."

What was it that finally freed Robbins to explore his Jewishness so uninhibitedly? Deborah Jowitt sheds no light on this puzzle, save to quote Robbins as saying that the show was "a glory for my father—a celebration of & for him." Whatever the reason, he unceasingly goaded his collaborators to avoid the obvious, and the result was a powerfully moving visit to the lost world of turn-of-the-century Russian ghetto

life, one that has retained much of its impact 40 years later.

The enduring strength of *Fiddler* was made clearer still by its latest Broadway revival last spring, in which David Leveaux deliberately soft-pedaled the Yiddish element in the original production, opting instead for a scenically spare presentation that some critics felt to be insufficiently "Jewish" in style. Even so, *Fiddler* made its customary impact, in this case heightened still further by the circumstances under which it was being seen. At a time when much of Western Europe was being blighted by a sickening recrudescence of anti-Semitism, *Fiddler's* tough-minded departures from traditional musical-comedy orthodoxy could hardly help being seen in the lurid light of recent events, and the impression they made was all the more potent as a result.

THE SUCCESS of the original *Fiddler on the Roof*, which ran for 3,242 performances, made Robbins a wealthy man. It also seems to have freed up some constriction in his psyche. He had parted company with the New York City Ballet in 1956, and between then and the opening of *Fiddler* in 1964 he had made only one ballet of significance, *Moves* (1959). A year after *Fiddler*, though, he created an ambitious new version of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* for American Ballet Theatre, and in 1969 he returned to NYCB, where he created a long string of works, including *Dances at a Gathering* (1969), *In the Night* (1970), *The Goldberg Variations* (1971), *In G Major* (1975), and *Mother Goose* (1975), that re-established him as the foremost American ballet choreographer of his generation.

Yet in spite of everything, Robbins remained full of doubt. In 1975, he

⁴ "Sholem Aleichem is deprived of his voice, his pace, his humane cleverness, and boxed into the formula of a post-*Oklahoma* musical: the gags, the folksy bounce, the archness, the 'dream sequences,' the fiercely athletic dances" (Irving Howe, "Tevye on Broadway," COMMENTARY, November 1964).

checked himself into Harvard's McLean hospital to be treated for depression. Writing in his journal about his fear of the publicity that might result from his stay there, he described himself as "a Jewish ex commie fag who had to go into a mental hospital." All the self-loathing he felt throughout his life is packed into this crudely ironic phrase.

At the heart of his anxiety, it seems, was the fear that he would be *exposed* as "a Jewish ex commie fag." Never mind that he had proclaimed his Jewishness to the world in *Fiddler on the Roof*, that his homosexuality was by then a wide-open secret, and that his membership in the Communist party had become known long ago when he testified before HUAC. Despite all this, he still believed, as he confessed in another journal entry made a year later, that such publicity might wreck his career:

I was & have been—and still have terrible pangs of terror when I feel that my career, work, veneer of accomplishments would be taken away . . . the façade of Jerry Robbins would be cracked open, and behind [it] everyone would finally see Jerome Wilson Rabinowitz.

To read such agonized confessions is inevitably to be put in mind of George Balanchine, whom Robbins worshipped, calling Balanchine "the great master of our age." Although his personality was at least as complicated as that of his younger colleague—and although he suffered from at least one potentially crippling form of self-doubt, regarding himself as physically unattractive—Balanchine had none of Robbins's deep-seated uncertainty.⁵ Unlike Robbins, he knew who he was and what he could do, and this assurance gave him a facility that Robbins envied. "When I watch Balanchine work," the younger man wrote in his journal in 1971, "it's so extraordinary I want to give up."

That Robbins should still have suffered from such anxiety at the age of fifty-three says much about his character. That he persisted, however, may say even more. Toni Bentley, who danced for both men at NYCB, recently paid tribute in the *New York Times* to the courage that led Robbins to work in the shadow of a far greater artist:

Robbins was Salieri to Balanchine's Mozart, and we all knew it. On the Great White Way he was "Mr. Robbins," the King of Broadway, but in the elevators and

studios backstage at the New York State Theater he was "Jerry," just "Jerry." Balanchine was the Man. And he was the Man to Jerry too. Perhaps Jerry found it a relief. No one understood Balanchine's depth better than Jerome Robbins. . . . Robbins had the intelligence and humility to embrace it and risk living under its moral reckoning.

Seen in this light, Robbins's belated decision to embrace his Jewishness in *Fiddler on the Roof* acquires a similar tint of courage. What, after all, could be braver than to do the thing one fears most? All of which suggests that the success of *Fiddler* was no accident—for it is by way of such courage, however fleeting, that an artist gives of himself most fully. If, as seems likely, it is *Fiddler on the Roof* rather than *West Side Story* that will be remembered as Jerome Robbins's greatest achievement in the commercial theater, this may be the reason why.

⁵ As I wrote in 1997, "Balanchine was the ideal type of what the playwright Friedrich Schiller called the 'naive' poet—the wholly natural genius unburdened by romantic self-consciousness. Robbins, by contrast, is a no less ideal example of Schiller's 'sentimental' poet, beset by ideas, intensely aware of his alienation from the natural world, forever seeking redemption through his art."

The Big Lie (I)

Are the "occupied territories" really occupied territories?

As Adolf Hitler discovered, the Big Lie will eventually be accepted as the truth. The Big Lie, the monster whopper of our time, is that the provinces of Judea/Samaria, often called the "Bank," are "occupied territories."

What are the facts?

A Brief History: Most of the area now called the Middle East was part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire before World War I. Germany lost the war and so did its ally Turkey. The Ottoman Empire ceased to exist and the League of Nations assigned Britain and France as the mandatory powers.

France assumed mandatory control over what is now Syria and Lebanon. Britain assumed mandatory control over all the rest, including "Palestine," which comprised all that is now Jordan and Israel, including the "West Bank." The Golan Heights, which Syria now claims as its age-old patrimony, was originally part of Palestine.

In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, under which Palestine was to be the homeland for the Jewish people. In 1921, Winston Churchill, who was then Colonial Secretary of Great Britain, separated all the land east of the Jordan River from the territory designated to be the Jewish homeland, and awarded it to the Hashemites, who established the kingdom of Transjordan.

The Arabs, whipped up by their fanatic clergy, fiercely opposed the presence of the Jews on what they considered "sacred Moslem territory." There was constant warfare between the two groups, which the British tried to arbitrate, always favoring the Arabs, whom they considered more important to their imperial interests.

In 1947, the British decided that they had enough and resigned the Mandate. They left the Arab-Jewish antagonists to their own devices and turned it over to the United Nations. Their solution was to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The area west of the Jordan River (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip were allotted to the Arabs. Jerusalem was to be an "international" zone. After much soul searching, the Jews accepted the partition and, in April 1948, declared their independence in the area

allotted to them by the partition. The Arabs rejected the partition out of hand. On the very day of Israel's birth, five Arab armies invaded the nascent Jewish State. In what must be considered an almost Biblical miracle, the rag-tag Jewish forces decisively defeated the combined Arab might. But Israel had suffered enormous casualties – 6,000 dead, about one percent of its population.

Israel not an "occupier:" Israel stayed in control of most of the area east of the Jordan River, except for the Gaza Strip, which stayed under Egyptian control. The "West Bank" and the eastern part of Jerusalem stayed under the control of Transjordan, which promptly renamed itself Jordan and proceeded to ruthlessly expel all Jews and to obliterate all vestiges of over 2,000 years of Jewish presence in that land.

In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel recovered the "West Bank," the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, conquered Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and conquered and annexed the Golan Heights. During the 19 years that Jordan and Egypt were in possession of the "West Bank" and the Gaza Strip, it didn't occur to them or to anybody else that the Palestinians should have a state or even that they were a distinct nationality. The claim for that did not arise until after the Six-Day War.

Jews have been living in Judea/Samaria since Biblical times. The area was made *judenrein* (free of Jews), following the Nazi model, by Jordan, when it was in possession of the territory. After 1967, Jews moved back into the territory and a great hullabaloo was raised and is still being raised about the not more than 200,000 "settlers," who do not occupy more than 2 percent of the area. But there is no concern about the hundreds of thousands of Arabs, who, lured by the prosperity of Israel, have flooded into the area, nor of the more than one million Arabs who live in Israel proper and who enjoy full rights of citizenship.

Israel acquired the territories (the "West Bank" and Gaza) in defense of an aggressive war waged against it. No country in history has ever been asked to return such territories. Do the Poles return the huge chunk of Germany that they acquired in the wake of World War II? Do the Czechs return the Sudetenland, do the French return Alsace-Lorraine? Of course not! Only Israel is being asked to return such territories. The last sovereign of the "West Bank" and of Gaza were the Ottomans. The "West Bank" and Gaza are unallocated territories. To speak of Israel as "occupier" is preposterous; to speak of it, as Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the UN does, as "illegal occupiers," is poisonous slander. He knows better. But unfortunately, the Big Lie of Israel's "occupation" has been repeated so long and so often that even people of good faith have come to believe it and to accept it.

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Books in Review

Artificial Intelligence

Broken:
The Troubled Past and
Uncertain Future of the FBI
by Richard Gid Powers

Free Press. 492 pp. \$30.00

Reviewed by
James Q. Wilson

IN THE wake of 9/11, and especially of the report of the 9/11 Commission (formally known as the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States), the country expects its intelligence organizations to be changed in ways that will make it easier for them to “connect the dots” so as to alert us to any future terrorist attacks. But just what changes will achieve that goal is not entirely clear.

If specific and obvious leads about the impending 9/11 attacks were received by senior officials, and then deliberately ignored, we should wor-

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ry deeply about our intelligence systems. But if, on the other hand, there were leads about the 9/11 attacks that got lost in the general noise of countless tips about all manner of terrorist threats around the world, then a sensible policy would be to stop brooding about intelligence failures altogether. The latter seems to have been the case when, decades ago, Congress investigated the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941; it turned out that we knew too much then, not too little, and had no way of deciding which hints were worth pursuing.

Richard Gid Powers, a historian who has written books about the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, and anti-Communism, was working on a new history of the Bureau when the Twin Towers were struck down by hijacked airliners. His first reaction was the 1941 one: surely, any leads the FBI may have had would prove to have been indistinguishable from meaningless noise. As he completed his research, he decided that he was wrong. He discovered what he believes were smoking guns.

Powers's interesting book includes a historical account of the FBI from the time of its predecessor agencies, formed early in the 20th century, down through its much-celebrated campaigns against Depression-era gangsters and against Nazi and Communist spies. Most of this material is well-known. The heart of the book, however, lies in Powers's discussion of the smoking guns and of the culture of the Bureau that led them to be ignored. These chapters make especially valuable reading in conjunction with the report of the 9/11 Commission, and should be carefully studied by people who think they know how to fix the problem.

FOR NEARLY a decade, the FBI and the CIA had been keenly aware of Osama bin Laden. In 1998, a sealed indictment against him had been produced by a federal court; a year later, an unsealed indictment alleged that bin Laden was responsible for the attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. By June 2001, the intelligence agencies were warning senior American officials that bin Laden was planning a “spectacular” strike against the United States.

Against this background of keen interest and clear warnings, two FBI officials also sent specific warnings that have since been extensively covered by the press. In a July 2001 message, FBI agent Kenneth Williams in Phoenix reported that Middle Eastern students were taking flight courses, that they hated the United States, that one had a poster of bin Laden in his room, and that several were members of al Qaeda. A month later, FBI agents in Minneapolis reported that Zacarias Moussaoui, a Middle Easterner with hardly any flight experience, had paid \$6,800 in cash to get access to a flight simulator for a Boeing 747, normally reserved for the most experienced pilots in the country. Hawkins learned that Moussaoui's visa had expired and that he was eligible for deportation; local agents arrested him, and decided to get a search warrant to look inside his computer. French intelligence told the Minneapolis agents that Moussaoui was a member of al Qaeda.

What is remarkable is what FBI supervisors in Washington then did with this information, or rather did not do. Williams's memo was shelved because, Powers asserts, acting on it "might appear to unfriendly observers to be racial profiling." The Minneapolis request for a search warrant, which could have been issued by a special court that handles such requests when they involve foreign intelligence, was likewise derailed by FBI headquarters. One supervisor asserted, wrongly, that the Chechen group of which Moussaoui had been a member was not a foreign-intelligence target. Then, after the Minneapolis agents labored to establish a link between the Chechen group and al Qaeda, another supervisor wrongly deleted statements about that link from the application for a warrant. An FBI lawyer then decided that the application could not be sent up to the court.

The supervisor who blocked the Minneapolis bid for a warrant was promoted. When Minneapolis agent

Coleen Rowley wrote a public memo to FBI director Robert Mueller explaining how badly headquarters had handled the Minneapolis requests, some supervisors contemplated bringing criminal charges against her.

ONE WAY to interpret these events is to dismiss them as the routine, albeit regrettable, errors of a few bad supervisors. That is not Powers's view. To him, the supervisors' actions flowed directly from a desire to avoid any "unnecessary" actions. Since at least the time of the Church Committee hearings in 1975, the Bureau had learned that what most often landed it in political trouble was not what it failed to do but what it did.

Recall the series of problems that produced the Church Committee's report. A domestic counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, had been aimed at disrupting radical organizations. The hotel room of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been bugged. Some activists burgled an FBI field office in Media, Pennsylvania, where they discovered documents showing how the Bureau was wiretapping the Black Panthers and conducting surveillance on the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other New Left movements. FBI agents had illegally broken into the homes of families of Weather Underground members. Other agents were involved in the long standoff between law-enforcement personnel and members of the American Indian Movement at Wounded Knee. After the so-called Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped Patty Hearst, it took the Bureau months to find the captors even though they were robbing banks as they moved about. And so forth.

The image of the Bureau as a professional, nonpartisan, and utterly competent agency was in disarray. The Church Committee published a fierce denunciation of its practices. Although the bureau's new directors, William Ruckelshaus and Clarence Kelley, worked hard to rebuild confidence in the agency, theirs was, at

the time, a hopeless task. As Powers puts it, many Americans had turned against not only the FBI but the entire federal government of which it was a part. In the late 1970's, the number of domestic-intelligence investigations being carried out by the FBI fell from 22,000 to 4,000. The Bureau pretty much stopped developing informants in radical organizations. Without informants, an investigative agency is dead in its tracks.

THIS PROBLEM remained at the heart of Louis Freeh's tenure as director from 1993 to 2001. To him, the FBI should be chiefly concerned with ethics, and that meant being reactive: the only safe law-enforcement activity would be in response to events that had already occurred.

The foundation for this reactive posture had been put in place by former Attorney General Edward H. Levi in 1976. Under his guidelines, a "preliminary investigation" could be launched when the Bureau had allegations that someone might be engaged in activities involving the violation of federal law. But such inquiries were limited to 90 days, were to be confined to reviewing files and public records, and could have no goal other than to learn whether the allegations were true. If the Bureau, within those three months, wanted to start a full investigation, it had to have discovered "specific and articulable facts" and it had to have the approval of the Justice Department.

Whenever it appeared that the Bureau was violating the spirit of this order, the political roof fell in on it. Even a closed investigation could become meat for Bureau critics—as when William Sessions, an absolutely hopeless director, publicly apologized for one investigation despite the fact that it had been authorized under the Levi guidelines and had been approved by the Justice Department.

Matters became still worse during the Clinton administration. That was when Jamie Gorelick, at the time a key official in the Justice Department

and later, ironically, a member of the 9/11 Commission, issued a ruling that stretched even farther the gap between intelligence and investigative work. Her instructions, she conceded, went "beyond what [was] legally required"; their goal was to "prevent any risk of creating an unwanted appearance" that the FBI was acting inappropriately.

Powers summarizes the lesson of his history: "Any revelation that the Bureau kept any eye on anyone who had not yet committed a crime would be used against it." I would amend this slightly: any revelation that the Bureau was keeping an eye on left-wing groups would be used against it. Very few complaints were to be heard about the FBI's having thoroughly infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan (at one time, about a fifth of the Klan's members were Bureau informants), and a major movie was made about the success of an FBI agent in becoming a member of a Mafia organization. But if it pene-

trated the Weather Underground, or Citizens in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), or the Black Panthers, the Bureau was in trouble.

Of course, there were cases in which a Bureau investigation was clearly wrong, as in the bugging of King's hotel room. And there were and are instances when the Bureau has come in for lambasting from the Right, as in the episode of David Koresh and the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. But these were exceptions. What the Bureau learned was that it could either penetrate radical groups or avoid penetrating them, and that the former course was exceedingly dangerous to its ability to function at all. Powers puts the matter this way: "You can't protect a country that doesn't want to be protected."

TODAY, THE Patriot Act has eliminated the barrier between intelligence and investigative agents so that the

Bureau and the CIA can share information with each other and also with law-enforcement officials. But the larger problem remains: share *what* information?

Dealing with terrorists here or abroad means getting leads from people in or close to terrorist or potential terrorist groups. Doing that means, often, putting a double agent in place. In the case of a group composed of United States citizens or lawfully admitted aliens, an agent asked to penetrate such a group might well recall the two high Bureau officials who narrowly escaped going to prison for having broken into the homes of members of the ultra-radical Weather Underground.

To all the current talk about changing the culture of the FBI, Powers has a withering reply: "The FBI can no more create its own culture independent of the rest of government and the rest of society than Rhode Island can create its own climate independent of Massachusetts."

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Whom will agents believe today, an FBI director who tells them what they may investigate, or their memory of senior officials facing jail time for having investigated too aggressively?

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So far, I think, the answer is probably no. That may change, but in the volatile, polarized politics of Washington, D.C., I am not optimistic. Carl Stern, once an NBC reporter, used the Freedom of Information Act to pry material about COINTELPRO out of the Justice Department. His successors could use the same law as a weapon against an American MI-5. England, significantly, has no such law.

The same sorts of problems plague other recent proposals for overhauling our intelligence services, including those of Senator Pat Roberts and of the 9/11 Commission itself. As is well known, the Commission suggested the creation of a cabinet-level national intelligence director who would oversee homeland security by, among other things, having under his command the head of the FBI's intelligence office. Such an arrangement might help reduce the lack of communication between the CIA and the FBI that characterized the months leading up to 9/11, but I remain skeptical that a new cabinet bureaucracy would produce close working-level cooperation between the agencies. In any case, whatever its merits, the new strategy would do nothing to deal with the widespread reluctance to adopt the bold steps necessary to penetrate and destabilize terrorist groups here at home.

Those steps require that senior law-enforcement officials be willing to take the heat when the press reports that a (possibly) innocent Islamic group is now under the Bureau's microscope or that "racial profiling" has occurred. The lessons these officials have learned from their experience with radical groups and Central American support organizations still shape their consciousness. With many left-leaning politicians and much of the mainstream media now suggesting that our invasion of Iraq was a mistake, those old lessons have hardly been forgotten.

The Right Man

Miles Gone By:
A Literary Autobiography
by William F. Buckley Jr.

Regnery. 594 pp. \$29.95

Reviewed by
Dan Seligman

WILLIAM F. Buckley, Jr. retired, sort of, on June 29 of this year. He gave up his controlling shares in *National Review*, the conservative magazine he founded in 1955. This watershed event, disguised as a minor financial transaction, has inexorably led to efforts by others to evaluate the meaning of Buckley's 55 years onstage in the world of ideas, and especially to assay the nature and extent of his influence on the political landscape. An interesting question—and ideal topic for intercollegiate debate—is whether the conservative movement would look substantially different today if Buckley had chosen to live as a playboy, which he could easily have done.

Buckley's latest book does not address this question. Rather, it serves up an illuminating report on the events and people who shaped his

life. Not exactly an autobiography, *Miles Gone By* is essentially an anthology—a collection of writings and pronouncements that, one way or another, offer glimpses of Buckley at work and at play from childhood (we come in on him at around age twelve) through yesterday. In order to do this he has stitched together some 60 or so articles, book reviews, columns, reminiscences, excerpts from books, the transcript of a 1978 *Firing Line* debate with Ronald Reagan over whether to give up the Panama Canal (Buckley argued the affirmative), and even a fragment from one of his novels that is said to "depict pretty exactly" some vignettes from his army years, including a scene in which the Buckley character loses his virginity in Phenix City, Alabama.

I cannot think of another writer who could have recycled so much old material and ended up with a work that most readers will find fresh and original. What makes this possible in Buckley's case is in part his spirited style but mainly the fact that even his dedicated fans will have previously encountered only a small fraction of his Stakhanovite output. A bibliography covering his work from 1951 to 2000 states that he has produced 34 books of nonfiction, 15 novels, 81 book reviews, 56 introductions, prefaces, or forewords to other people's books, 222 obituary essays, more than 800 articles and editorials for *National Review*, and more than 4,000 syndicated columns. The bibliographer, William Meehan, adds that Buckley's unpublished writings (mostly correspondence) fill over 100 huge boxes at Yale's Sterling Memorial Library.

THE EARLY pages of *Miles Gone By* depict a magical childhood. Billy, as he was designated in the family, was born in 1925, the sixth of ten children, and "home" during his early years was a sizable estate in Sharon, Connecticut called Great Elm. Its proprietor, William F. Buckley, Sr., appears to have been a shy, somewhat introverted, but quite daring busi-

DAN SELIGMAN is a contributing editor of *Forbes*.

nessman who initially struck it rich in Mexican oil before seeing his properties expropriated and barely escaping with his life in 1921. He later made another fortune in Venezuela, but *Miles Gone By* gives few details.

It is clear that during Buckley's early years his father was often absent; it is also clear that he commanded the unquestioned love and loyalty of his often fractious brood, upon whom he imposed some unique ideas about education. To a degree, the Buckley children received what is now called home schooling. Tutors were omnipresent at Great Elm. The children seem to have learned French and Spanish, and learned as well to play musical instruments—the house had five pianos—ride horses, sail boats, and shoot pheasants. At one point, Billy and two of his sisters were sent to study at Jesuit schools in England, mainly, it appears, because their father believed they were not speaking their native tongue properly.

Buckley's upbringing had a distinctly aristocratic dimension. He describes a scene at the annual Dutchess County horse show, where the Buckleys and Roosevelts had adjoining boxes. When his sister Trish won the blue ribbon, she received an ovation from President Roosevelt, which she disdainfully ignored. As the young lady returned to the family box, her father asked: "Why didn't you nod to the President?" Her loyal answer: "I thought you didn't like him."

Buckley devotes 40 pages of *Miles Gone By* to a replay of the wars over his 1951 *God and Man at Yale*. The saga leaves one marveling at the iron resolve and self-assurance of the twenty-six-year-old author, who produced this book (in three months) just after graduating and subsequently did not yield an inch on the issues it raised—principally Yale's hostility to religion and capitalism—even as he found himself ridiculed, demonized as an enemy of academic freedom, and proclaimed a crypto-fascist by the liberal establishment's heaviest guns. It also leaves one wondering at the college's wild overreac-

tion, captured in Dwight Macdonald's crack, gleefully quoted here, about Yale showing "all the grace and agility of an elephant cornered by a mouse."

Although he has surely earned his reputation as a warrior in the world of ideas, this self-portrait reminds us that Buckley is also an adventurer—a man endlessly, restlessly looking for kicks. Huge chunks of the book con-

cern his passions for ocean sailing, for skiing, and for flying (which he gave up while still at Yale after crashing a plane on the lawn of the Ethel Walker School, in Simsbury, Connecticut, where his sister Maureen was a student). Travel to the South Pole? Take the Orient Express from Peking to Moscow? Perform a harpsichord solo with the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra? Run for the mayoralty of

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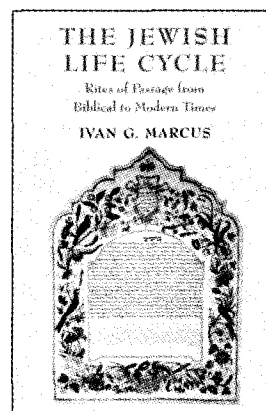
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New York? Why not? One has to assume there is a connection, possibly metabolic, between the energy evidenced in all this adventuring and the staggering output registered in Buckley's bibliography. The on-off switch seems always turned to "on."

As has often been observed, Buckley has friends all across the political spectrum. He has skied with both John Kenneth Galbraith and Milton Friedman, although perhaps not with both at the same time. To judge from the examples given here, which include several film stars—Princess Grace, David Niven, Roger Moore—a touch of class may be more important to him than political alignment. A special gem in the section on friends and colleagues is an eighteen-page portrait of Whittaker Chambers in his final years, capped by his enrollment as an undergraduate at Western Maryland College to study science even as he was overwhelmed by a final weariness. "He learned science, and killed himself," Buckley writes. "Those were the two things, toward the end, he most wanted to do."

Miles Gone By is a fantastic read, reflecting the fantastic trajectory of Buckley's life. Still, even while admiring and enjoying it I found myself wishing that Buckley had opted to write a genuine autobiography—one that might have illuminated many matters not discussed in this book. I, for one, would like to know if he ever goofs off, and I am also curious about his IQ. On a more substantive level, I would like to know where, if ever, he thinks he has gone wrong over the years. For instance, does he wish in retrospect that he had been more vocal in criticizing Joseph McCarthy? And—highly relevant these days—what would be his own assessment of his accomplishments? If he were on the Yale debating team today, which side of the question I began with—about the fortunes of the conservative movement—would he be inclined to argue?

Almost everyone who has weighed in on that question has given Buckley a lot of credit for either jump-starting or mightily helping the conservative cause. But within this consensus one can already discern two quite different perspectives. Liberals make the point that he has given conservatism a much friendlier face, and that his wit and panache have assured two generations of college students that conservatives need not be dull, stuffy, or intellectually bankrupt. This "public relations" view of his achievements is generally rated inadequate by conservatives; they see Buckley as preeminent in supplying and propagating the message that ultimately got Ronald Reagan elected. As Reagan himself said in 1985: "Bill Buckley is perhaps the most influential journalist and intellectual in our era—he changed our country, indeed our century."

My own tentative view of the case combines elements of both positions. It begins with the proposition that there would have been a powerful conservative tide even in the wildly counterfactual scenario wherein William F. Buckley, Jr. had opted to become a playboy. That tide was guaranteed by mass affluence and the emergence of a modernized South in the 50's and 60's. But in the world of ideas, liberalism still remained overwhelmingly dominant, and it thus made a huge difference, especially in the years before neoconservatism came along, to have a beacon out there to guide a generation newly receptive to conservative thinking. In a sense, Buckley was lucky to have founded *National Review* in 1955. The timing was perfect. He bought into the market of ideas just when conservatism was at a low, and ready to take off.

He also deserves a great deal of credit for artfully steering his magazine on a difficult course in those early years. He opted against the sectarian irrelevance that would have doomed *NR* if, as seemed briefly possible at the time, it had refused to endorse Eisenhower in 1956 (because,

some of his editors argued, Ike had succumbed to New Deal doctrine). Simultaneously, he managed to make it plain that conservative ideas mattered more than Republican-party interests.

The only existing biography of Buckley is *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives*, by John B. Judis. Published in 1988, it benefits from much good reporting but suffers from being out of date and from Judis's inability to suppress his horror of conservative ideas. Now in the pipeline, but apparently a couple of years from publication, is another biography, by Sam Tanenhaus, currently doing a stint as the editor of the *New York Times Book Review*. One hopes it will give Buckley the high-level reckoning he has so dashingly earned over the years (and maybe even deliver the goods on his metabolism).

African Mystery

The Full Cupboard of Life by Alexander McCall Smith

Pantheon. 208 pp. \$19.95

Reviewed by
Roger Kaplan

ON THE map you will find Botswana north of South Africa and west of Zimbabwe. It is characterized by big skies and the Kalahari desert and the Limpopo River, and by the abiding respect shown by its inhabitants, who belong for the most part to the Tswana ethnic group, for the owning and raising of cattle.

Obed Ramotswa, a good and decent man, has invested in cattle the money earned from long, difficult,

ROGER KAPLAN, who reviewed Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Way to Paradise* in our May issue, has written on African politics and literature for a number of publications.

and dangerous years in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa. This insures the security of his beloved daughter Precious, upon whom his affection has focused after the death of his wife. He urges Precious to make good use of this estate, perhaps selling a few head to start a business she can manage in Gaborone, Botswana's capital.

Obed Ramotswe knows that he has raised an intelligent and sensible girl, one with proper Christian values acquired at missionary schools; but some things will not be learned except through bitter experience. Indeed, in her young folly, Precious has chosen the wrong husband, a musician and ne'er-do-well who mistreats and abandons her. Precious promises herself she will never remarry. After her father's death, she sells some of the herd and opens the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency, the first private investigation firm of any kind in Botswana. "These were its assets," writes her chronicler:

a tiny white van, two desks, two chairs, a telephone, and an old typewriter. . . . What else does a detective agency really need? Detective agencies rely on human intuition and intelligence, both of which Mma Ramotswe had in abundance.

"Mma" is a traditional honorific for a grown woman, and Precious Ramotswe, courteous to a fault, well-spoken, attractive, traditionally built, commands respect. "She was a good detective, and a good woman. A good woman in a good country, one might say. . . . I am not ashamed to be called an African patriot, said Mma Ramotswe. I love all the people whom God made, but I especially know how to love the people who live in this place. . . . It is my duty to help them to solve the mysteries in their lives."

AND THAT is the premise for a remarkable series of novels by Alexander McCall Smith, which began a few years ago with the publication of *The No. 1 Ladies De-*

tective Agency and appears to have reached its conclusion with the marriage of Precious Ramotswe to Botswana's finest automobile mechanic, Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, in this year's *The Full Cupboard of Life*.*

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, too, is a decent human being—he "would do anything for one who needed help, and, in a world of increasing dishonesty, he still practiced the old

Botswana morality." His only defect is his lack of a mate, or rather his unwillingness to conclude a marriage tie. Like any sensible detective, Mma Ramotswe cannot, past a certain point, solve other people's problems if she does not solve her own, and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni—as everyone, including his long-suffering fi-

*In his just-released *The Sunday Philosophy Club*, McCall Smith has a new heroine, the Scottish-American Isabel Dalhousie.

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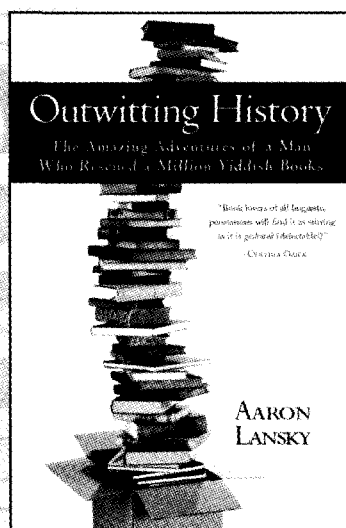
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ancée, refers to him—is her own special mystery.

Like the other mysteries solved by Precious Ramotswe over the course of these stories, this one is skillfully and without ostentation related by McCall Smith to the larger African mystery, of which Botswana is both typical and atypical. Born and raised in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), McCall Smith lived for several years in Botswana and has a great deal of affection for its people, who were spared the turbulence that marked their neighbors during the waning years of white power in southern Africa. This was due to the country's isolation and poverty as well as to the wisdom of British colonial administrators who were able to keep the colony of Bechuanaland beyond the grasp of the Boer-dominated National Party when the latter terminated the Union of South Africa and took their new Republic out of the Commonwealth.

Independence came in 1966, as did the discovery of some of the world's richest diamond mines. The management of the resulting wealth, combined with the fiscally prudent, socially enlightened policies of Botswana's paramount chiefs (traditional rulers who have had no difficulty winning democratic elections) made Botswana into the Denmark of Africa. It has the continent's strongest currency and lowest crime rate, and is viewed by bankers as Africa's safest bet for investment.

The problem is that investment has not translated into job growth, and estimates of the country's unemployment rate range as high as 40 percent. Moreover, Botswana's populated eastern corridor, from Gaborone to Francistown, is a major stretch of Africa's north-south transportation network and hence one of the conduits of the HIV epidemic. According to U.S. and World Health Organization estimates, Botswana has the highest infection rate in the world: in a population of 1.5 million, there are

300,000 carriers, 21,000 of whom died last year.

ALTHOUGH AIDS is a critical plot element in only one of the Precious Ramotswe novels, the crisis of which the HIV epidemic is at once cause and symptom is one of McCall Smith's main themes. This is the crisis of Africa: the devastating rapidity with which modernity has overwhelmed the traditional societies of the continent.

McCall Smith's characters are sharply aware of this crisis, and the best of them know very well that it is pointless to expect others to solve it for them. They believe that they will get through, and that they will get their country through, by maintaining their traditional ways without rejecting modernity outright; on the contrary, they will embrace the modern world—"selfish and full of cold and rude people" as it is—without being seduced by it.

Of necessity, then, Mma Ramotswe is something of a feminist: Africa needs women who can take on roles that are not traditional for them—as private detectives, for example. She observes men exploiting women and (she is not *that* much of a feminist) women getting their own back. A man steals. A woman cheats. A child is abducted. She believes these bad habits must change, not only as a general principle but for the sake of her country's success. Big answers to the African malaise are easy to come by—colonialism and politics, climate and geography. Still, dealing with small but terrible events, a lady detective drinking bush tea in Gaborone may also bring an answer, or the beginning of one.

That is perhaps why her major preoccupation, throughout the cycle of novels and particularly in *The Full Cupboard of Life*, is marriage, the best hope for family stability and by inference for social decency. There is, for example, a rich client whose many suitors must be investigated to weed out the gold-diggers. And there is her own remarriage. Although Mr. J.L.B.

Matekoni has proposed long ago, at the end of *The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency*, he has been in no hurry to change; he has procrastinated over the course of the three intervening books.

Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni's personal habits are conservative, irreproachable; but they are focused on his garage and on the dump he calls home. Gradually, in this latest novel, a mutual friend of the engaged pair, the bossy matron of the Gaborone orphanage, moves matters along. First she convinces Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni to adopt an orphaned brother and sister. Later she devises a mad fund-raising scheme involving a parachute jump that has the desired consequence of forcing the date of the wedding. All's well that ends well under the great African sky.

But of course all is hardly well. People persist in their felonies and frauds and much larger crimes—the ultimate human mystery, the insoluble one, but the one that must be constantly addressed. Gracefully and with a great deal of understated humor, McCall Smith shows his characters coping with these large and small crimes, thereby repeatedly making the point that if modern history is a nightmare from which too many Africans are trying to escape, so too is ancient history—their own ancient history. With or without the intrusions of immigrants and colonizers and adventurers and crooks and do-gooders from everywhere, that history is what they are stuck with. Once again the good characters in these books are simply the ones who accept the responsibility of the hand they have been dealt. The bad ones are the ones who evade it. In the American political spectrum, Precious Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni would be Booker T. Washingtonians.

Where does this leave the reader? McCall Smith's view of the Tswana people is, undoubtedly, idealized. Notwithstanding scenes of murderous witchcraft, catastrophic epidemic, selfishness, cruelty, and the sheer

daily struggle of making ends meet, Precious Ramotswe and Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni project an image of gentility and civilization that may thrive more in the exiled imagination of their creator—McCall Smith lives in Edinburgh, where he teaches medical law—than in Gaborone's neighborhoods. It is not by accident that some of his many readers have reportedly been lured into "No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency Sightseeing Tours" (high-end tourism is a major Botswana industry).

But, after all, Arthur Conan Doyle's more devoted followers are known to indulge in the same sort of thing. McCall Smith's merit is to have given us a picture of Africans as they ordinarily really are, dignified and kind and admirable, the picture that is hidden by the jackals, as Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni calls them, who are too often at center stage.

Art Hysterics

**The Rape of the Masters:
How Political Correctness
Sabotages Art**
by Roger Kimball

Encounter: 200 pp. \$25.95

Reviewed by
Steven C. Munson

AS IN other areas of our intellectual life, the practice of art history and art criticism has been increasingly corrupted in recent years by, for lack of a more precise term, the ideology of political correctness. Case in point: the Modigliani show at the Jewish Museum this past summer. Here, an early-20th-century artist recognized as a genuine "little master" of the School of Paris was subjected to an entirely bogus effort to reinvent him as a Jewish socialist "conceptualist." This was arrant non-

STEVEN C. MUNSON contributed "Modigliani à la Mode" to our September issue.

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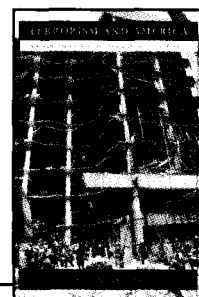
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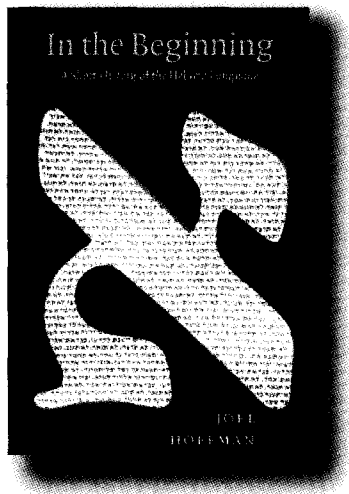
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sense, and it also entailed an injustice. Modigliani's art, having been injected with a non-existent motive—the desire for “progressive” social change—was made out to be something other, and something less, than what it actually is.

Such injustices are common these days, if not prevalent, according to Roger Kimball in *The Rape of the Masters*. His book examines eight examples of contemporary art-historical revisionism, tracing its roots to the writings of the French philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Kimball also offers useful insights into how one should think about art. Above all, his book stands as a record of protest against intellectualism run amok.

Kimball's eight case studies are the heart of his book. They are instructive, providing a cautionary tale in the misinterpretation and overinterpretation of art on the basis of inappropriate criteria. They are also illuminating, showing just how far some distinguished academics are prepared to go in their effort to rewrite the history of art so that it meets today's standards of politically correct thought.

One such academic is Michael Fried, director of the humanities institute at Johns Hopkins University and the author of a book on the 19th-century realist painter Gustave Courbet. Kimball captures Fried in the act of “reinterpreting” Courbet—specifically, a painting titled *Young Women on the Banks of the Seine* (1856-57)—in acceptably feminist terms:

My argument can be summed up by saying that in the *Young Women*, what appears at first to be simply or exclusively a strongly oppositional thematics of sexual difference (the women as objects of masculine sexual possession) gives way to or at the very least coexists with a more embracing metaphors of gender (a pervasive feminization of the pictorial field through an imagery of flowers).

In other words, while Courbet, according to Fried, was “a representa-

tive male of his time,” i.e., a “chauvinist,” his art can be seen as “structurally feminine” and as tending to “eliminate the distinction” between men and women. This finding presumably allows the dead white Frenchman to continue to pass muster.

As Kimball points out, Fried does not shy away from admitting that his claims are “so extreme” that he doubts that Courbet could have grasped them. Nor do some of the other academic specialists discussed by Kimball shrink from making the most extreme, not to say ludicrous, bizarre, or offensive, claims about the art and artists they have chosen to deconstruct.

Albert Boime, for example, is a professor of art history at UCLA and the author of an “immensely influential essay” (in Kimball's description) entitled “Blacks in Shark-Infested Waters: Visual Encodings of Racism in Copley and Homer.” In this essay Boime turns *The Gulf Stream* (1899), a painting by the American realist Winslow Homer that depicts a black man adrift in a damaged boat in a hurricane, into a vehicle for Marxist-style anti-Americanism:

Homer's conspicuous representation of the [sugar cane] stalks, totally out of proportion to the boat and its lone passenger, assumes a symbolic and etymic connotation in its intimate relationship to the history of slavery in the West Indies. . . . But when Homer painted his picture, this allusion would have taken on yet another level of meaning: America's imperialist ambitions—culminating in the Spanish-American War of 1898—devolved on the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, all of them rich sugar-producing territories and all of them worked by blacks soon to suffer the discriminatory policies of a racist society.

In a similarly fevered vein, and in similarly turgid prose, the art histo-

rian David Rubin writes about John Singer Sargent's *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882), a well-known example of the American society painter's family portraits. Inspired by the politically correct categories of class and sex rather than class and race, Rubin transforms this painting into an act of sexual "repression," in which

figured in absentia is the master or boss of these young females whom the title designates as his children but who, seeming to await his slightest word or wish, might also be thought of as his servants, his domestics, and even, at the level of submerged sexual fantasy, as his harem, his congregation of wives, his *jolie fillettes du bordel/maison/boîte*.

THIS SORT of perverse inanity is the ultimate fruit of the hallucinatory mindset of today's politically correct academics. In accordance with that mindset, Kimball demonstrates, the history of Western art—art spanning continents and centuries—is being systematically turned on its head and rendered unrecognizable to anyone who approaches such matters from within the boundaries of normal human understanding. *The Rape of the Masters*, Kimball tells us, is intended to provide an "antidote" to such practices, and hence to the intellectual disease that has engulfed much of the academic art establishment and, indeed, much of our intellectual life in general.

In this Kimball succeeds admirably. Along the way, he also offers thought-provoking observations on the nature of art appreciation and the proper role of the critic. As one might expect, he takes a "minimalist" view of that role. This makes good sense up to a point—though only up to a point.

Let me illustrate what I mean. In a chapter on Van Gogh, Kimball refutes a "metaphysical" interpretation of one of the Dutch painter's most famous works, *A Pair of Shoes* (1886), that was put forward by the

German philosopher (and later Nazi fellow-traveler) Martin Heidegger. Kimball is rightly put off by Heidegger's rhetorical flights of fancy about the toil of the common man, which seem disconnected from the painting itself and amount to little more than speculative hot air. But the fact that Heidegger got carried away with himself and his own subjective ideas, instead of allowing the picture to speak for itself, would hardly seem to warrant Kimball's rather arch dismissal: "And here you thought that Van Gogh had just painted a pair of old shoes."

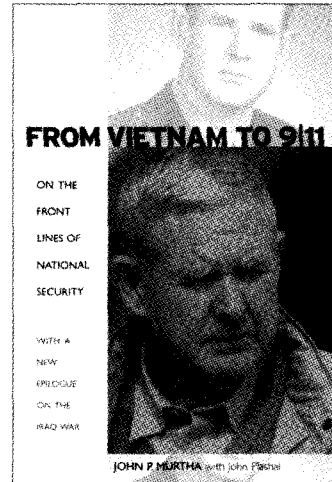
In fact, Kimball elsewhere concedes that Van Gogh's painting is "remarkable" and exudes a "mysterious loneliness," suggesting that it is much more than a mere rendering of footwear. The trouble here may be that in dealing with Heidegger, who wrote long before political correctness arrived on the intellectual scene, Kimball has conflated bad art criticism, which has always been with us, with a very particular type of revisionist criticism motivated by today's politically correct agenda.*

Kimball's discussion of Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) likewise falters somewhat. In passing, he cites a comment by Michel Foucault to the effect that the painting reflects "an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation—of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance." Kimball assumes this is self-evident nonsense. But if one considers the formal implications of Foucault's statement, what he seems to be picking up on is a quality of emptiness and lifeless resemblance in *Las Meninas* that has disturbed other commentators as well. Here is the great German art critic Julius Meier-Graefe:

One must not imagine the picture without the figures, for otherwise the result would be an empty

*For my own view of the role of religious feeling in Van Gogh's mature work, see "Why We Love Van Gogh," in the December 1998 COMMENTARY.

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nothing. Individual figures . . . and certainly the main group possess . . . cohesion with one another but not with the surrounding space. . . . Are these really human beings? There is something immobile in all his figures, even in the best of them and in fact especially in them.

Whether one agrees with this assessment or not, it is hard to deny its echo in Foucault.

THIS is not to say that Kimball is wrong to decry the misapplication of psychoanalytic or political criteria in a search for the "hidden" meaning of art, a point he makes with devastating clarity. Rather, it is to raise again the question of what *are* the appropriate criteria to apply in any such discussion.

Kimball neatly sums up the primary criterion by saying that we should consider the "superficial," by

which he means what is on the surface of the canvas. This obviously does not include the viewer's politics or anything else that is purely subjective; nor does it include the *artist's* politics, unless he paints political pictures. One must likewise be cautious in evaluating what the artist claims he is doing, or trying to do, especially if it does not seem to be supported by the work itself.

As the examples Kimball cites make clear, the kind of politically correct exegesis now in vogue fails the test of appropriateness in spades. But it also violates the art to which it addresses itself in a more fundamental respect—by (to cite a distinction made by the critic Roger Fry) confusing the purpose of art, which is to give expression to the imaginative life, with the purposes of actual life, which in the case of politically correct criticism is to cause us to think differently about such issues as sex

and race, and to alter our actions accordingly.

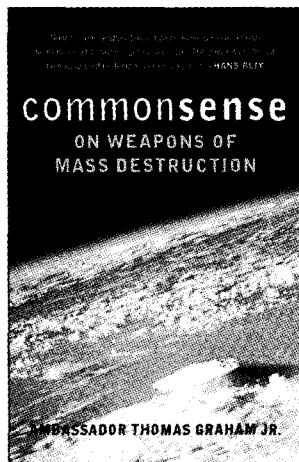
What ultimately renders spurious the approach adopted by the art historians discussed by Kimball is that they seek to associate with painting a certain political-moral obligation to promote "right" conduct (to be non-racist, or anti-imperialist, or pro-feminist). It is in this sense that the efforts of these academics can be said to constitute the "rape" to which Kimball refers. For their main consequence is to devalue or trivialize or degrade much of the great art of the past while raising up the inferior (and often dreadful) art of our own time.

THAT THIS is indeed the consequence of applying the ideological tenets of political correctness to art and art history is clear. But there is an interesting complication: if the champions of political correctness were to implement their own strictures, would they not have to call for the wholesale destruction of most of the paintings, and most of the art-history books, that are part of the cultural patrimony of the West? For, by their logic, those paintings and books are nothing less than a permanent embodiment of "hate crimes" against the poor, the non-white, and the female.

And yet, logic notwithstanding, and despite the inroads of political correctness in academic curricula, demands for the outright banning of "incorrect" texts and paintings have never gained much traction. To be sure, some have tried—for example, by calling for the removal of a photographic reproduction of Goya's *The Naked Maja* from the wall of a college classroom, or by making students read expurgated versions of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with offending words like "nigger" removed. But such antics have only succeeded in making political correctness itself into an object of scorn and ridicule, so much so that the term has come to be used mockingly or disparagingly.

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ment has scored a big success—the rewriting of commercial public-school textbooks—the result has provoked heated controversy, and the real achievement seems more to have been a further dumbing-down of public education than a wholesale reprogramming of young minds. By the same token, the craze for campus “hate speech” codes quickly ran into the brick wall of the First Amendment, no doubt demonstrating to academic radicals the limits of any effort to put their extremist views into practice.

Could it be out of a recognition of this reality that politically correct art historians have by and large tried to rewrite history, rather than to erase it? Certainly their work often displays the rather peculiar quality of a salvaging operation—an attempt, even while discrediting the cultural products of Western humanism, to look for a way to re-validate those same products by imposing upon them an ideologically acceptable “meaning.” Hence a Michael Fried will attribute to Courbet a proto-feminism that the painter’s works manifestly do not support, or Albert Boime will attribute all sorts of late-20th-century racial sensitivities to Winslow Homer.

This activity, too, as Kimball makes vividly clear, is offensive to and destructive of our notion of what is fitting to examine in the course of serious inquiry. It violates what were once clear and high standards of acceptable scholarship. It can misinform, mislead, and confound readers both about the nature of art in general and about the extraordinary achievements and lasting value of the Western tradition in particular. And even as it “rescues” certain dead white artists of the past, it demonstrates a complete lack of respect for them as well as for their living legacy.

Nevertheless, art has been subjected to ideological assaults before—think of the early Soviet proscription of non-socialist realism or the famous Nazi exhibition of “decadent” (i.e., modern) art—and both art and our ability to experience it have survived. It is true that the current revisionism

is more insidious, since it is not enforced or sponsored by state power but is rather the result of a voluntary exercise of academic freedom. That is reason enough for Kimball’s book to become required reading in every art-history course in America. But I would still contend that, for anyone who is prepared to resist the politicization of thought, reading a bad book or a bad article about a painting by no means makes it impossible to engage and experience that painting on its own terms, especially if one knows enough to trust what he sees and feels, and if, as Kimball advises, he concentrates on that.

Evil Emperors

The Dictators
by Richard Overly

Norton. 448 pp. \$35.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Johnson

THE 20TH century was the time when ideology far outstripped religion as the engine of mass destruction. Fired by the promise of revolutionary redemption, nations not only came close to eradicating their enemies but placed themselves and their own posterity in peril as well. Two individuals have come to personify this immolating and self-immolating impulse: Stalin and Hitler. Their symbolic status as the embodiments of modern tyranny has long since eclipsed the specific enormities of their crimes.

But not in equal measure: 60 years after his melodrama in the bunker provided a squalid postscript to the suicide of European civilization, Hitler remains a kind of secular Satan, a universal touchstone of evil. Although his methods have been imitated in Asia, Africa, and even Eu-

DANIEL JOHNSON is associate editor of the (London) Daily Telegraph.



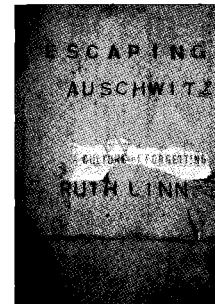
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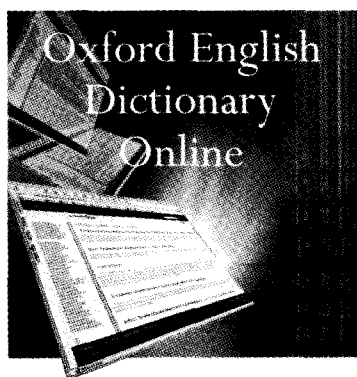
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rope, today's practitioners or would-be practitioners of genocide shrink from acknowledging their debt to him. On the contrary, those, for example, who seek the annihilation of Israel denounce Zionism by likening it to Nazism. Presumably they do not mean this as a compliment.

Stalin, by contrast, is already a shadowy figure in the popular imagination. The moral credit that accrued from his alliance with the democracies in World War II persists even after the intervening decades of the cold war. Unlike Hitler's, Stalin's crimes remain unpunished, uncommemorated, unmourned—even in the former Soviet Union. Although his name has not yet been rehabilitated in Vladimir Putin's Russia, the same cannot be said of his *modus operandi*. Whereas it is inconceivable that the German secret service could re-establish itself in the old Gestapo headquarters in the Prinz-Albert-Strasse in Berlin, its Russian counterpart has just moved back into the notorious Lubyanka building in Moscow that housed the torture chambers of the Soviet state-security apparatus, successively named Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, and KGB.

RICHARD OVERY's *The Dictators* is by no means the first work to compare the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, but it surpasses all others in breadth and depth. The author describes his book as an "operational history" of the two dictatorships, designed to show how they actually worked. He begins with the careers of Hitler and Stalin, and concludes with their attempts at mutual destruction. But his method is less chronological than analogical. Each of the 14 chapters postulates a phenomenon common to both systems—the one-party state, the apparatus of terror, totalitarian morality, the command economy, and so forth—and then proceeds to distinguish between the German and Soviet experiences.

Overy's comparisons are often arresting. He claims, for instance, that

the Nazis achieved a more thorough surveillance of their population than the Communists ever did; on the other hand, there were more than 40 attempts on Hitler's life, but none on Stalin's. Germany had a larger and more advanced economy than the Soviet Union, but the latter produced more armaments with fewer workers, even after the Nazis had occupied much of European Russia. Each tyrant created a personality cult, but Stalin's "view of it was opportunistic and cynical, whereas Hitler's was deadly earnest." Both men had utopian architectural ambitions, but Hitler's monumental People's Hall in Berlin would have been outdone by Stalin's Palace of the Soviets in Moscow, which, had it been built, would have been taller than the Empire State Building, capped by a statue of Lenin three times the size of the Statue of Liberty.

In his most suggestive chapter, "The Moral Universe of Dictatorship," Overy asks the question: why did the Nazis and Soviet Communists think they were right? Here he shows how both regimes subordinated religion and law to their purposes, adopting an extreme moral relativism that denied the existence of any norms or necessities beyond those dictated by their own historical circumstances. Both subsumed individual conscience into the collective will, driven by ideological imperatives. The clergy and courts, like other elites, were either co-opted or crushed. Though neither Germany nor the Soviet Union succeeded in eliminating what Hitler called "the disease of Christianity," the moral constraints imposed by Judeo-Christian and classical humanism were, as Overy recounts, surgically removed from the body politic. Totalitarian jurisprudence taught that the state was above the law, and that the law was a continuation of war against class or racial enemies by other means.

The paranoia of the dictators was thereby institutionalized. Visitors to Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union

felt an uncanny sense of entering another world, its claustrophobia reinforced by international isolation. Nonetheless, for all their own provincialism, Hitler and Stalin were global missionaries on behalf of their respective utopias. As Overy points out, they held sway over evil *empires*, not backwaters like today's North Korea.

They also saw themselves as locked in what one refugee, Aurel Kolnai, called "the war against the West." In this they resembled today's radical Islamists. And, again like the Islamists, they had their adherents inside the West itself. The nightmarish theatricality of the great dictators impressed itself on their contemporaries partly because so many were drawn into their intellectual orbit. The source of the attraction was partly pragmatic, or could be so presented: according to their own propaganda, at least, the dictatorships outperformed the democracies in economic efficiency and military might. But there was also, for outsiders, the lure of participating vicariously in the unique, unprecedented spectacle of a society organized on "scientific" principles: two gigantic experiments, ultimately tested to destruction against one another.

THE WEST'S "totalitarian temptation" was, of course, incomparably stronger in the case of Communism than in that of National Socialism. Indeed, the habit of playing down the crimes of the former, which tended to be less familiar than the latter's, is still with us. Overy makes strenuous efforts to be evenhanded in his own critique of the two tyrannies, but even he occasionally falls into the trap. Thus he dwells in devilish detail on the vividly visualized and richly documented bestiality with which the Nazis have scarred the collective memory of Europe, but Soviet atrocities sometimes seem fuzzy in his pages, recalled in impressionistic terms that belie their prodigious and sustained horror.

This discrepancy may be attributable in part to the lack of schol-

arly consensus about the numbers of victims, to the heterogeneous nature of the Soviet Union, and to the haphazard process by which former Soviet archives became accessible during the window of opportunity that opened under Boris Yeltsin and that Vladimir Putin is now trying to slam shut again. But it remains the case that Overy tends to give Stalin the benefit of the doubt, either offering

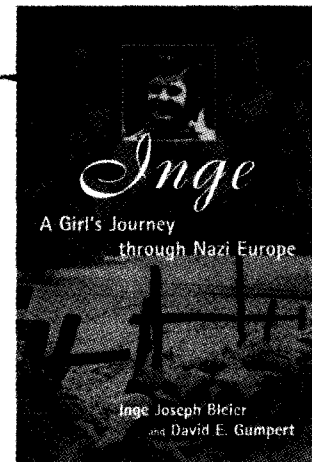
no specific figures or accepting estimates at the lower end of the scale.

Thus, for example, he does not even attempt to guess how many of the nationalities, ethnic minorities, and "class enemies" proscribed by Stalin actually died as a result of forced migration, incarceration, or massacre. He mentions the Ukrainian famine of the 1930's only briefly, and ignores the fact that millions of

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non-Ukrainians also died in it. Though he cites Anne Applebaum's recent definitive history, *Gulag*, he seems to take little account of her reflections on the death toll in that vast system of prison camps. Like her, he quotes an official figure of 786,098 political executions in the period 1934-53, but whereas Applebaum points out that this figure is too precise to be reliable, and omits numerous categories of deaths, Overy prefers to pour scorn on estimates of a much higher toll. Nor does he cite, as she does, two other shocking statistics: under Stalin, some 28.7 million forced laborers passed through the camps or special exile villages, of whom a minimum of 2.75 million died.

According to *The Black Book of Communism* (1999), the grand total of those executed, tortured, starved, or worked to death during the 74 years of the Soviet Union comes to

some 20 million, the majority of them directly attributable to Stalin's policies. And even this figure may be too low if, as some Russian historians now suggest, it may be necessary to double the traditionally accepted total of 20 million military and civilian deaths in World War II. During the reconquest of the Soviet Union, Stalin's policies toward those who had been occupied, captured, or recruited by the Germans were harsh in the extreme, especially those (Jews, Balts, Poles, Volga Germans) whom he deemed to be, as it were, hereditary traitors. More interested in the confrontation between Hitler and Stalin, Overy deals too cursorily with its only slightly less horrific aftermath.

Above all, Overy nowhere acknowledges that, even if no single crime can be compared with the Holocaust, there is reason to suppose that Stalin's victims outnumbered Hitler's, probably by a large margin.

The more that we learn about Stalin's dictatorship, the more sinister it seems, most of all in its ability to cover its tracks.

Not that Overy is by any means an apologist for Stalin. He is careful to guard against the temptation to judge Communism more leniently than Nazism simply on account of its supposedly noble ideals, and he has no illusions about the "real existing socialism" in whose name so many millions of real existing human beings were sacrificed. If he is nevertheless harsher on the Third Reich than on the Soviet Union, that is because he thinks Stalin was merely a new kind of Czar. In his earlier, masterful work of military history, *Russia's War*, Overy argued explicitly that "Stalin did to his people what Russia's rulers had always done." He does not repeat this judgment in his new book—indeed, it does not square with the totalitarian novelty of the Communist experiment, which he evokes so well—but I suspect it somewhat colors his attitude to Stalin.

THESE CRITICISMS aside, *The Dictators* is a book of great importance, the first proper comparative study of the two most destructive empires of the last century. Overy probably knows more about the still unassimilated congruence of the two systems than anybody else alive, and in the pages of this book he authoritatively sets out the evidence for all to see.

The Dictators is a book that should be widely read not only in America, where the background to European perfidy cries out for explanation, but also in the Islamic world, where the putrefying remains of both Nazi and Soviet ideology continue to exert a malign influence. With its dry prose and understated eloquence, it is a monument to the millions who, dying in agony and anonymity for their race or their nationality, their class or their creed, bear witness to the bottomless abyss into which modern ideologies unchecked by the laws of God or man have threatened to hurl all of mankind.

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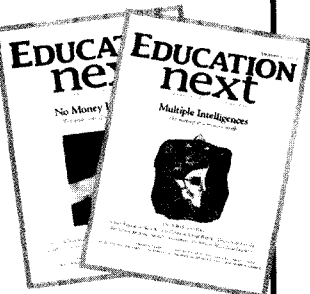
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Oliver Brown—the plaintiff in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision—sued a school board, not a public park commission, even though such facilities were also segregated. Within the private sector, discrimination was pervasive.

Yet, today, we see marked progress toward racial equality in parks, recreation programs, politics, communications, commerce, and industry—but not in schools.

The irony is all the greater, inasmuch as the Supreme Court, in *Brown*, outlawed only school segregation—on the shaky grounds that such segregation harmed the “hearts and minds” of African American children.

But at a time when the workplace is more often racially mixed than not, ***Brown's* educational consequences remain ambivalent.** On the plus side, most school districts have become as integrated as city demographics allow. But the price paid for this integration has been high—involuntary busing that separated schools from families and communities; large, difficult-to-manage school campuses; white flight; and lowered expectations for students of all social backgrounds.

Worse, the performance of African American students has continued to trail that of whites. Although the gap narrowed in the 1980s, it opened again in the 1990s, a time when the principles of *Brown* should have been firmly entrenched.

Conventional liberals blame “politicians” for inadequate funding or “society” for its abiding, if now hidden, racism. But money has seldom bought educational progress, and one is hard put to explain

the survival of racism in schools when it is on the wane elsewhere.

Conventional conservatives are more apt to “blame the victim,” suggesting that the child-rearing practices of the African American family are the root cause. Yet the disparities in black and white achievement are smallest among preschoolers—the age at which family influences are pronounced and school influence nil.

Closer to the truth are those who blame Hollywood, television, and the fashion industry for fostering a drug-infested, antilearning, “hip-hop” youth culture that burgeoned in the 1990s. But if street culture is the problem, then assigned neighborhood schools are not the solution. Only in rare instances can traditional neighborhood schools suppress the seductions of their immediate environment.

Learning is better fostered when schools draw boundaries that separate classroom life from the street-culture opiates. Because good private schools have discovered this secret, African American students who attend them are much more likely than their public school peers to complete college.

Unfortunately, some still argue against school choice on the grounds that African American families are too ill-informed to pick good schools. But interest, knowledge, and commitment will come naturally to all parents, once choice is made available. To claim otherwise is racist in the extreme. **School choice is, indeed, the civil rights issue of our time.**

—Paul E. Peterson

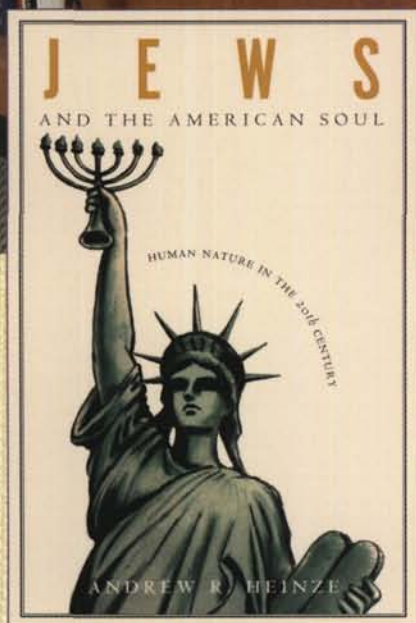
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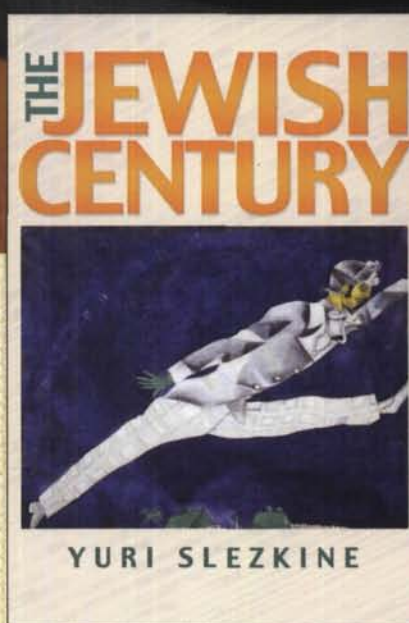
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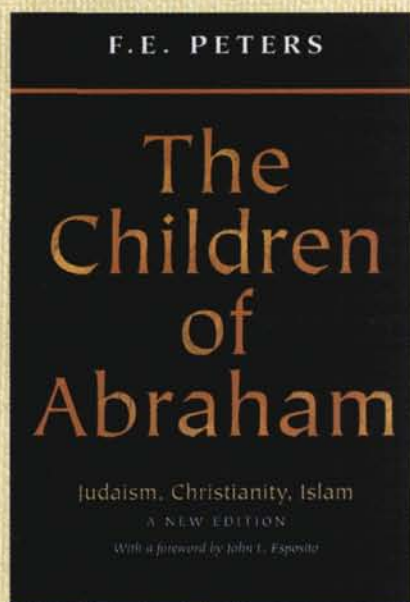


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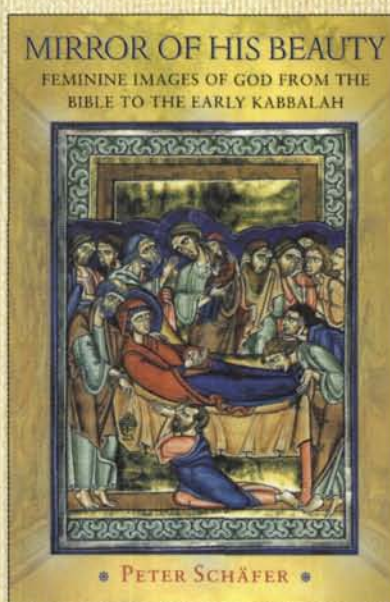
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